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*AS IT WAS . . .*  
*WORLD WITHOUT END*



AS IT WAS . . .  
WORLD WITHOUT END

by  
HELEN THOMAS

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H. T.

*AS IT WAS*



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## I

I REMEMBER so well that very first meeting. We lived then in a little new villa in a row in a new road quite near Wandsworth Common. The front room was the dining-room, and the piano was there; the back room at the end of the passage looking on to the tiny garden, which was kept full of flowers, was my father's study. This was lined with books, and in the middle of the room was his knee-hole writing-table. On the table were scattered papers, his tin of Three Castles cigarettes, and his small tumbler of weak whisky and water. As a child I used to marvel at the way he puffed the smoke out of his mouth after sipping his whisky and water. He smoked and sipped all day, while he wrote with his thin, delicate hand in his small, thick writing, or lay on the sofa by the window reading the three-volume novels

## AS IT WAS

which he reviewed for part of his living. My father had a name as an essayist and critic among a small public, but he had to eke out his means with reviewing and journalism, and we had just moved from Liverpool to London so that he could be more in touch with literary affairs.

Our house was comfortable and pleasant and very cosy, with people always coming and going. My mother and father were both very sociable and hospitable, and, though there cannot have been much money, owing to my mother's wonderful management there was always everything we wanted, and the unexpected guests who often turned up were warmly welcomed. My father's study was the general sitting-room, and here all visitors were invited. Nothing disturbed my father at his work so much as to be left alone. Often when my mother thought we were getting too noisy for him, we would creep out unnoticed by him into the dining-room, but in a few minutes we would hear his strange halting step in the passage, and his voice asking why we had left him, and back we would all have

## AS IT WAS

to troop, to read aloud, play games, talk and laugh, while he wrote an essay or reviewed a book.

Our life was very happy, very social, very united. We were unconventional, though in no startling way—just informal and unselfconscious. A good deal of freedom of movement was allowed to us children, and freedom of speech and thought; and so far we had all pulled together, interested in new movements—"well up in things," I think we should have said—mainly artistic and especially of course literary—and with wide views on religious and social questions. I think we were rather typical Unitarians—the denomination to which my father belonged—except that we were poorer than most Unitarians, and that as our income was very irregular our ways were not so bound by the conventions that seem to be set up by a regular flow of money. By the well-to-do of our type we should have been called Bohemians.

I think at this time we were all at home: that is, my eldest sister Ruth; myself, seventeen and just left school; and my youngest

## AS IT WAS

sister, Carrie, still at school. Both my sisters were clever, and had carried everything before them at school. I hated school, where my sisters' brilliance threw into sharp relief my own incapacity, and I had begged to leave and be at home with my father, whom I adored.

I remember that afternoon. We knew the strange boy was coming. Our Unitarian minister had asked my father to look at some of his work and see if it was any good, and father had thought so highly of it that we had already nicknamed the boy "The Genius." Perhaps we had been told he was shy; anyway we left the study and went into the dining-room, and when he came he was shown straight in to father, who was waiting for him. We girls were playing the *Mikado* on the piano and singing, and between whiles laughing and talking of the boy and wondering what he would be like, and I think feeling a slight, amused prejudice against him for being shy and serious and clever. Soon, when we thought father had had enough of him to himself, we thought we should like to

## AS IT WAS

see him, but my two sisters drew back at the door; so I went in alone. I opened the door, feeling silly, and giggling, because of the rather extravagant things we had been saying about him, and just inside the door, standing by the bookshelves with an open book in his hand, he stood, so that I came upon him sooner than I had expected. This made me laugh the more, or feel inclined to laugh, had not his face, into which I looked, immediately changed my mood. My father introduced us and our eyes met—the boy's solemn grey eyes rather over-shadowed by drooping lids with long lashes. He did not smile, but looked very steadily at me and I at him as he took my hand with a very hard and long grip. I remember feeling pleasure in that first touch and thinking "I like him, I like the way he shakes hands and the straight, intense look in his eyes." After I came in, the talk lagged, my father doing his best to keep things going, but David was too shy and constrained by my presence to be able to talk. And soon he went, refusing to stay to tea to meet my sisters. I can't remember if he dwelt much in my



## AS IT WAS

thoughts after the first meeting, but I do remember that though I thought him shy and awkward and silent I liked him and wanted to see him again.

David was tall—just six feet—and slim, with a broad chest and shoulders, which he carried well—loose-limbed and athletic. He had a beautifully shaped head with a fine brow, and his thick fair hair, worn rather long, curled a little over his forehead and ears. His nose was long and straight, his mouth very sensitive, with the upper lip slightly overhanging the lower. The chin was strong. The eyes were grey and dreamy and meditative, but fearless and steady, and as if trying to pierce to truth itself. It was a most striking face, recalling a portrait of Shelley in its sensitive, melancholy beauty. His hands were large and powerful, and he could do anything with them from the roughest work to the most delicate: they symbolize for me his strength and his tenderness. It is his hands even more than his beautiful face that remain in my vision when I think of him; I shall never forget them.

## AS IT WAS

He came often, and always father liked to have him alone, but shortly before he went I used to slip in and try to talk to him. I have no recollection of how we got on, but I think not very well, because his shyness made me shy.

My father helped him a great deal with advice about writing and reading, and with father he got on well and talked well, whose genial kindness and interest slowly broke down David's reserve. My father became very fond of him and used to call him Phil, because his first name was Philip, and my parents had had a little boy called Philip who had died as a baby, and by a strange coincidence David's features and general colouring were very like this baby boy's, and I believe my father felt that this was his boy—the boy of his heart, loving the things he loved, and seeking self-expression in the same way that my father had sought it. My mother, on the other hand, grew to dislike him. She was jealous. She could find in this quiet, reserved, clever boy no point of contact, though as a rule she got on splendidly with boys, and

## AS IT WAS

preferred them to girls, and many came to the house, but none like this one. The boys she liked were jolly, frank, well-mannered, easy creatures, intelligent enough most of them, though hardly ever speaking seriously of things, but genial and cheery, and who found her a very congenial hostess.

At this time David talked almost exclusively of the books he was reading—buying when he could, or borrowing from my father—and my appearance in the study stopped all talk except what could be dragged out of him by questions. I do not want to give the impression that his manners were those of a hobbledehoy, for though he was very shy and reserved, he had a natural courtesy and distinction of manner, which, though perhaps stiff for a boy of his age, was always dignified.

His writing was devoted almost entirely to descriptions of nature, of clouds, sky, trees and landscapes, and I had read and liked very much some of his essays. My father got several of them accepted by a weekly paper of which he was then co-editor, and the *Globe* printed some, and father was encouraging

## *AS IT WAS*

him all he could with appreciation and advice and help. This period is a little vague to me, for I was outside it and was conscious of no attraction towards him beyond the impression, still very distinct, made by that first surprisingly firm grip, and that straight look, which made me patient with his silence, his shyness and his awkwardness.

I had always had a strong yearning for the country. Our life had been spent in towns in the North of England, and owing to my father's invalidism we were not, as so many children are, taken out long walks by our father, and our times in the country had been confined to our summer holidays in North Wales. But I loved the country, and David's knowledge of country things gave us a common interest and subject of conversation, so that slowly we got to easier—though even now not very easy terms—until one day my father said to David: "Here's Jenny dying for the country, and a good walker; why don't you take her, and show her some of the places you know?"

Before this happened we had moved to a

## AS IT WAS

much bigger and nicer house in a better neighbourhood. It had a very pretty garden, which had been part of an orchard, and had several fruit trees in it—one, a very beautiful old cherry tree, always lovely to look at, and full of fruit in the season. A forked branch made a comfortable seat, and I often sat up there reading, and I remember how David once found me, with bare feet and legs, eating cherries and reading, and his surprise and pleasure at finding me unembarrassed by his seeing me like that. The study in this house had French windows opening on to the garden, and so in summer time the garden became our general gathering-place, and the cherry tree's branches provided seats for several of the company. It was from this house that we set off for our first walk to Merton.

Merton was then a pretty rural place, with fields and lanes and footpaths and woods. We walked to it through a wilderness of mean streets, and I can't remember that we talked much. Now it was I who was shy, and conscious of my intellectual inferiority, and I

## AS IT WAS

tried to talk "up" to him, and became more self-conscious and said stupid things. But it was on this first walk that I spoke of the picture of a titmouse in a natural history which David had showed me some time before. It was a coloured illustration, and I could not believe that the colours were natural, and that such a lovely bright bird was really a common English, even London, bird. My short sight and lack of observation made me ignorant of even the most commonly known facts of natural history, and this picture impressed me very much, and I told David as we went along how I had dreamt of a titmouse, only it was gigantic in size, and the colours of its plumage very, very vivid. He was delighted and amused at this, and this simple incident put us quite at ease with each other. We spoke of poetry, too, of Wordsworth particularly. I told him I didn't care for him because he was "sentimental," which shocked David, and made me feel ashamed. Afterwards, when I got home, I read some of the poems he had spoken about, and from that talk my appreciation of poetry began.

## AS IT WAS

I remember in that first walk how we scrambled about in a little roadside copse. It must have been winter or early spring, for the trees were bare, and David showed me many old nests, telling me the names of the birds which had made them, and pointing out to me their special characteristics. Later on he brought me as a present a most beautifully compact, moss-covered nest of a chaffinch, which I could hardly believe was the work of a bird, and all my wonder pleased and amused him in his grave way. In that copse were many burdocks, and I remember asking him to throw some of the burrs on to my skirt, so that I could prove to my people I had really been into the country.

I enjoyed that walk. It was an utterly new experience for me. Everything was new—the very exercise which I found so delightful was new; the country so near home; my companion, the first boy I had ever been on such terms with. And all his knowledge of everything we saw, and all his intimacy—everything lifted me at once into a new world.

## AS IT WAS

I was at this time about eighteen, and he nine months younger.

We came back to tea in the dusk of the evening, very happy together, and with very much of our former constraint worn away. But even now I felt he was "The Genius" and I a very ordinary girl, as indeed I was.

After that he came and went, talking with my father, and more now with me, and accepted by my mother in a grudging way. In a little while we had arranged to go another walk, and my father was delighted with the success of his idea.

This time we were to take the train to Barnes, and walk up Priory Lane and over Richmond Park to the heronry where once at night David had climbed to get a heron's egg. I remember the place, which was near a big lake, and the tall trees (were they Scotch pines, or elms?) in which the huge, untidy, insecure nests were built, looking more like rafts of twigs than nests. I, with my dizzy head, could not endure it when he—to show me his prowess, I expect—



## AS IT WAS

began to climb the straight tall trunk of one of them.

He told me of his fishing exploits, and of the big pike he had caught in the pond nearby, for he was always a keen fisherman, and we spoke of Isaak Walton whom I had read I learnt here the names of several wild flowers, especially the little low-growing kinds—tormentil was one: I have never forgotten it, and its tiny bright flower always brings back to me Richmond Park, and that day. He found me a good walker; I did not get tired, nor lag behind, but stepped out eagerly and joyfully always.

Of these walks we took many, but only one other is clearly recalled to my memory. We went again to Merton, and talked of Shelley, whom we were both reading and both very full of. His life I knew very well, and he had for long been a hero of mine. It was his love of freedom, his hatred of injustice and tyranny that I chiefly responded to, I think, but also his spiritual beauty caught up my dawning perception of poetry. That day we talked of Shelley, and David

## AS IT WAS

had in his pocket a pretty little volume of selected lyrics—the flapping of a book in his jacket pocket as he strode along with his long sweeping stride is one of my earliest and latest memories of David—and we read “Adonais” and the “West Wind” and “Love’s Philosophy” and “Epipsychidion” together.

Coming home from Merton, not yet having left the country roads, and in the sunset-flushed mist of an autumn afternoon, as we walked side by side, silent for the most part, but deeply conscious of happiness and friendship, he took my hand, and I, full of a new wonder and a new fear, and a new something—I could not tell what, let him walk thus. When we got home he would not come in to tea, but as we said good-bye at the gate he asked me to keep the Shelley for my own, and I took it, but did not want to, and yet could not tell why.

I was a plain girl, morbidly conscious of intellectual and physical deficiencies. I had often cried bitterly in the thought that no man could ever love me, and that my longing

## AS IT WAS

for children would never be satisfied. I had so persuaded myself of this that it never entered my mind as a possibility until that moment when David took my hand; and even then I did not consciously think of love; all I felt was an unrest, a fear, a thrill, perhaps also a hope.

I was very affectionate, and almost painfully grateful to people who showed me affection, but conscious of my own unworthiness and with a constant distrust of myself. I think this was partly due to the contrast to myself in my two sisters, one older and one younger. Both were clever and self-confident, and admired. They both succeeded where I failed, and my mother constantly said to me when she was irritated by her ugly duckling, "Why can't you be like your sister Carrie?" and that remark made it more and more difficult for me to attain that ideal, and I shrank further into my shell of self-distrust.

I loved all children passionately, especially young babies. I loved to see a pregnant woman—I almost adored while I envied her. I desired love, but only, at any rate

## AS IT WAS

consciously, in an emotional or spiritual form, for I did not comprehend physical love, and the whole thing was very mysterious to me, and my mother had always refused to discuss the subject. I yearned vaguely for freedom, for something more than this quiet home life, where my mother's word was law. I had begun to have different tastes from the others. In dress, for instance, I took to what were then called Liberty dresses, very simple and plain in line, but of beautiful colours and ornamented with embroidery. The fashions then made this style of dress conspicuous, and my sisters laughed at it, but I was getting to the priggish stage, and I am sure I thought myself superior. I wanted less furniture in my bedroom, and more air, and I read Ruskin and Morris and became their disciple. David and I read Carlyle's *French Revolution*, and particularly *Wilhelm Meister*, which we loved, and which influenced us very much, me specially perhaps in my natural instinct for unreserve and freedom and frankness of speech.

I was at that age plain, with a round

## AS IT WAS

healthy face and small nose; rather serious in expression, but not entirely unattractive. I had a lot of dark brown hair, which I wore parted in the middle with long plaits wound round my head—a simple style suiting my dress and my general seriousness. I was straight and tallish, and my own well-shaped and strong and—as I think now—really lovely body gave me intense delight. I loved being without clothes, and moving about naked, and I took a pride in my health and strength. David and I read Richard Jefferies, and with delight I found the joy in one's body spoken of there as if it was right and good. For with my old distrust of myself I had wondered if the joy I felt in my body indicated some moral deficiency in me, as my mother's teaching had been in direct opposition to what I felt so instinctively.

David and I were getting much less reserved together, and talked of anything and everything—of poetry a great deal—Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Tennyson chiefly, I think—oh, and Byron too: indeed we read all from Chaucer onwards; all

## AS IT WAS

was grist to the mills of our devouring minds. Also we began to speak of ourselves, our hopes, our feeling about life, our intimate thoughts and experiences.

It must have been about this time that I introduced myself to David's parents and brothers. He was the eldest of six boys. He had no sisters, and except for brief, awkward attractions for one or two girls who lived near, I was the first girl he had ever become friendly with. He knew nothing of girls; less than I of boys, for though I had never been attractive to boys—my sister Carrie taking all these honours—I had met many at home, but I had never had a friend among them.

David's father, Mr. Townsend, was a serious-minded Liberal—a self-satisfied, hard-working and conscientious civil servant, who rose in his department quite remarkably. He was the thick-set, short, dark type of Welshman, handsome, but to me unattractive. He was a Nonconformist, and a student, with a very narrow view of life which made him an extremely unsympathetic father.

## AS IT WAS

All the boys except David were like their father in appearance, but not one of them like him in character. His mother was a very pretty fair-haired woman, with a sweet melancholy face, very retiring and shy and sad. David got his looks from his mother and much of his temperament, and he adored her—if such a word can be used of so reserved, so undemonstrative an affection, which never wavered. A wonderful sympathy existed between these two, both too self-conscious to give it voice, but both sure of it always. The other boys, though, were beyond her understanding, and there was a strange feeling of disharmony in that house, which, after my own united family life, depressed me whenever I went there.

I went to see Mrs. Townsend because I thought it only fair that, as my mother knew David, she should know me. I introduced myself boldly and impulsively, as I did things then. She was very kind, though shy and reserved with me; and I think liked me, anyway did not dislike me. When I returned home I told my mother about my

## AS IT WAS

visit, and she to my great surprise and distress was very angry. She said I had behaved in a very improper way, and that I had practically announced myself as engaged to David. I thought her attitude and her anger ridiculous, and there began in me that antagonism to my mother which on my father's death made home life unendurable to me.

After this visit I used often to go to David's home, and became well known to his father and brothers. I tried to pierce Mrs. Townsend's deep reserve, and I believe my warm, impulsive nature did achieve something. I got on very well with both Mr. and Mrs. Townsend, and felt easy and confident with them. I was a new element in the house, being a girl, and as I was full of interest, and with a good deal of knowledge, though immature, of artistic things, Mr. Townsend liked to talk to me, and I remember, in spite of my dislike of him, I felt flattered. Mr. Townsend had a great admiration for my father, as one of the foremost literary critics of the day. Later on Mr. Townsend made the



## AS IT WAS

acquaintance of my father, who was a man of great charm of manner and distinction of appearance, genial and humorous and sympathetic, and very generous with all he had, material and spiritual. So under the wing of my father's reputation and personality I was made welcome at the Townsends' and blossomed out there, freed from the everlasting comparison with my sisters.

The brothers were a strange lot of rather uncouth boys: their huge appetites and rough ways amazed me. Their parents provided no social life at home for them, and at a very early age they sought their amusements elsewhere. David was the only one who had a love of nature and literature. The very house seemed to me ugly and uninteresting, and there was only one room which had for me any character or charm, and this was David's own room—study and bedroom in one. There he kept his collection of birds' eggs and rods and fishing-tackle, and here he lived most of his indoor life reading or writing. A few photographs of pictures of Titian and Botticelli and Greek sculpture were pinned on to the

## AS IT WAS

walls, and there was a shelf of books—not many yet, for he had very little pocket money to spend. Here we were allowed to sit and talk and read, though his mother often asked me if I thought my mother would like it, and sometimes, because she was so uncertain that she was doing right for her boys, she would forbid us this room, and we had to be content to sit in the cold and formal little drawing-room at the back of the house.

At this time my father, who had always been delicate, began to show signs of the tuberculosis in the throat of which he died. He was not able now to see much of David, and when David came to the house my mother's dislike of him became more and more obvious. About the same time David went away for one of his long visits to Wiltshire, where his grandmother lived, and where he could wander all day on the Downs, and tramp about the outlying country with an old vagabond from whom he had learnt much country lore, and who had first taught him how to bait a hook, and skin a mole, and shout the "view-hallo" when the hunt was out.

## AS IT WAS

My mother, taking advantage of all the circumstances, forbade me to have anything more to do with David—to write to him or receive letters from him while he was away, or to see him when he returned. My father was too ill to be appealed to, and for the first time in my life I took the law into my own hands. I wrote to him secretly, and received letters from him through a school friend of his, who was a great favourite with my mother, and who came to inquire after my father and to bring my letters with him.

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## II

FRIENDSHIP had now become unconscious love. We wrote to each other every day, concealing nothing of our thoughts and ideas and emotions, and relating all that happened to us in our daily life, and the deeper experiences of our growing consciousness. The writing of my letters and the receiving of his were to me the most wonderful experiences I had ever had. I had found the friend of my heart, and my nature, hitherto so repressed, so morbidly self-distrustful, blossomed out, and I was expressing myself easily and well, and was always brimming over with things to tell him of myself and my reading, and I gained my greatest satisfaction in his appreciation and understanding and response. During his absence in Wiltshire David sent me boxes of wild flowers, and a thrush's egg—the

## AS IT WAS

first he had found. I have it still with the inscription I wrote on the lid of the box: "From my dearest friend, David Townsend, to be kept always in memory of a happy friendship."

During this time my father's illness got worse and worse, and after an operation in his throat, a few days after David's return, he died. I was alone with my mother the night before his death. We had left him for a little while in the care of the nurse, to get a little much-needed sleep, but we simply lay down on the bed in our clothes, expecting to be called at any moment. While we were alone together in the early hours of the morning, my mother, using all the advantage of our relation, and of the emotional crisis through which we were passing, and which for the while brought us together, asked me to promise to give up David's friendship. She saw more plainly than we where it was tending, and she so disliked David, and felt jealous of my growing affection for him. In the middle of a terrible discussion the nurse came to summon us

## AS IT WAS

to my father, who was in his last agony, and when we got to his bedside he was dead.

I remember my mother fainting, and my running upstairs to wake my two sisters, and the feeling of loneliness and despair that I had lost such a dear friend and ally. I remember waiting for the morning to come which would bring David outside the house to ask for news, and my running out to tell him, but I cannot remember how he took it.

After my father's death life at home became very different. His genial kindness and happiness withdrawn, my mother's harshness became more pronounced. Quite frankly she showed that her daughters were a bother to her. She had to add to her small income by taking in boarders, and these young men—quite decent and nice of their kind—became as her family. All the affection and sympathy she failed to give to her daughters she gave to these strangers, and they and she lived in the happiest relations. My friendship with David when it was mentioned was always alluded to with sneers and contempt.

## AS IT WAS

The young men took this up, and with my mother's approval did all they could to make things appear ridiculous. David never came to the house now, but though my mother had forbidden it she was powerless to prevent my meeting him, and I never hid from her that we did. We met and walked and talked, and love grew.

There was no definite moment when friendship became love, but a natural merging into love as we became closer friends. At this time we both knew that the friendship between us was the happiest thing in our lives, but we did not regard the future. We were content with the present. But I remember one evening very well. It was in the Spring and nearing David's birthday, March 3rd. We were walking on the Common, very happy, talking of what we had been reading, what doing, what thinking, walking as usual hand in hand. In a space of silence, when thought and emotion went to and fro between us too full even for speech, I felt that wonderful experience of the first stirring of desire, though at this

## AS IT WAS

time it seemed half-maternal tenderness for his big, strong body, and his lovely face, and his hand holding mine, which now held his more firmly—mingled with something new and strange that I did not understand. I remember how, with that emotion flooding my being, my heart beat too fast, and my face burned, and I could have fainted with the pain and the joy of it. For it affected me as later I was affected by the first flutter of my baby in my womb.

When we reached the place for good-night I could not let him go as he had always done before, but put my hands round his head and drew it down to mine and kissed his mouth and looked close into his eyes. And he returned my kiss and my look, and then turned to go. But as I turned to go, too, he caught me in his arms and pressed me to him and kissed my mouth and my eyes and my neck; blindly and fiercely he kissed me, and I abandoned myself to him, not responding but just yielding myself to his kisses. When I was in my bed I could not sleep, but lay trembling half with fear, half with



## AS IT WAS

wonder, at what I had awakened in him. I had not known that love could be like that—so fierce, so rough, so greedy.

Quite soon after my father's death my position at home became unbearable, and I left home to earn my living as a nursery governess with relatives of friends living at Broadstairs. I do not remember that this parting from David seemed terrible to us at all: we were so happy in our love, and so sure of the future. I do remember that my mother came to see me off, and that she uttered no protest and showed no surprise when David came too. So I left home for the first time in my life.

During the time that I was in Broadstairs, we wrote to each other every day. My letters were written last thing at night in the only time of my own that I had. My work filled my day. I had four young children to bathe, dress, teach (including piano and violin), take out walks, and mend for; and in the evening, when they were in bed, I was expected to play cards with Mr. and Mrs. Hayward on weekdays, and on Sundays listen patiently

## AS IT WAS

while Mr. Hayward read aloud to his patient wife and me Cary's translation of Dante. How I used to long impatiently for ten o'clock to strike, for when the hour came we stopped the game or the reading! They went to bed, and I to my room to read over again the letter I had had in the morning, and to write all that my heart and mind were full of. Long letters they were—poured out of my brimming consciousness. We wrote of our daily lives, our thoughts, the books we were reading, and our emotions. We hid nothing of ourselves from each other, and we now looked forward to a life together, when it would be possible. Marriage did not enter into our plans, but just a passionate desire to be one in body as we were in spirit.

Looking back, it seems to me unbelievable that we were so ignorant of sexual love. But we were very ignorant and very innocent.

During this time at Broadstairs I was very happy teaching and playing with the children, with whom I got on very well.

## AS IT WAS

Sometimes it happened that between putting the children to bed and dinner-time I was able to slip out on to the beach just below the house, and then it was my delight to run along the sand with the wind in my hair reciting aloud Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" or "Adonais." These and most of Shelley's lyrics and many of Keat's I knew by heart. I remember the exhilaration I felt in those few stolen moments as the strong salty wind snatched the words from my lips, and my breath too, and how I delighted in holding my head high and not lowering it against the speed and the strength of the wind, and how the sound of the wind and of the sea drowned the sound of my voice, and how I felt my own strength and my own place in the motion and strength and sound, for love had given me a consciousness of my own part and significance in the universe I had not dreamt I should ever know.

I had been at Broadstairs for many months and I was so inexperienced and I suppose so well, and so happy with my secret, that it

## AS IT WAS

never occurred to me to ask for a holiday, and none was ever offered. The servants and the nurse all had their times off, but I never had any. However, one day David wrote to me that he was coming into Kent to Horsmonden with a friend to fish together. He had been working hard for a Civil Service Examination, and this was to be a little rest before the examination actually took place. I remember when I asked Mrs. Hayward for the day, and told her why, she said, as if so surprised to find I had any life more than her children provided for me, "Oh, I didn't know Phyllis had got a Corydon." So very early one morning I set off. I had to get up at about five, for the journey was a tiresome cross-country one. The cook, who was very kind to me, had left me breakfast laid in the schoolroom, and I remember stealing downstairs so as not to wake anyone and finding to my great joy that the weather promised to be fine. I was wearing mourning for my father, but I hated it and the idea of it. I was too poor to buy a new frock for this great day; so I had made

## AS IT WAS

myself a white blouse to wear with my black coat and skirt; and with a big black hat, from which I had taken the black ribbon, putting instead a coloured scarf, I made the best of myself.

I remember only vaguely the journey. What I chiefly remember is the changing smell of the air from the sharp, salty sea air to the soft earthy smell of the green country. When at last I got to Horsmonden, David was there on the platform, and in a moment we were together. We did not speak or kiss, but when we got into the lane and I took in a great deep breath of the delicious air, he said, "O Jenny, love me more than anything that you love," and stopped in the lane, took me in his arms and kissed me, and we leant tremblingly against each other. And I, "I only love other things so much because I love you, dear." Then we walked hand in hand silently, till we came to the top of a little hill, when he ran down, pulling me with him till we were both out of breath and laughing, and we sat down by the roadside among cow parsley and speed-

## AS IT WAS

well, till we had got our breath again.

I remember every minute of that day—how we talked and talked as we walked, I not noticing where we were going, but deeply conscious of all the beauty, so strange and so especially lovely to me after the sea and the barren country just inland.

We came at last to a mill pond and to a stick planted in the bank. Here David leant down and pulled up a bottle of lemonade that he had let down into the cool water, and from under a bush he produced a basket full of sandwiches, eggs, cake and fruit, all wrapped up in cool leaves. Not far from the stream was a little copse, and here in the coolness, within sound of the stream, and on a carpet of dog's mercury we sat and ate and talked. I was very hungry after my early rising, and as I sat with David's arm round me, and he was stroking my hair, I soon began to feel sleepy, and when he saw that he made fun of me. It was a hot summer day, and even in the shade of the copse it was hot, and so David unfastened the first few buttons of my blouse to let the

## AS IT WAS

air in on my throat, and then with dry leaves he made a place for me to lie, and took off my shoes and stockings. And I lay down in the little place he had made for me, and he sat down by me and, kissing my eyes shut, told me to go to sleep, and soon I was fast asleep. I don't know how long I slept, but I think not long. I was wakened by feeling his face near to mine, and when he saw my eyes opened he kissed my eyes and my mouth and my throat, and took my head between his hands and kissed me again and again, and I, putting my arms round him, drew him to my breast, and so we lay in each other's arms, with our hearts beating wildly together. And yet I can remember no desire for more than this; the new rapture of such an embrace contented us utterly. Then we walked through meadows and woods, and through a beautiful park, where I first learnt to distinguish trees. I remember the lime trees there and the beech, and it seems strange now that there was ever a time when I could not recognize the fine-textured skinlike bark, and the set of

## AS IT WAS

the trunk and branches like human limbs, and the beautiful curve that the leafy branches make, like a hand opened for giving.

For tea we made a fire and boiled a kettle. It was the first time we had had a whole day together; the first time we had eaten out or doors together; picnics had been very rare treats in my towny childhood, and this seemed to me the height of happiness. My surprise and joy and excitement in it all were as wonderful to David as the whole adventure was to me.

At dusk I went. He saw me off in the train, and that day ended, and we did not see each other again for many months.

During this time David was working for his examination, but very half-heartedly, for he hated the idea of an office life. He had very much wanted to go to Oxford, but the idea was not encouraged by his parents, partly on account of the expense and partly because his father thought that university life would encourage David in his desire to earn his living by writing, which his father well knew would never



## AS IT WAS

lead to a fortune, while fame never entered his mind as a possibility. My father's influence had, of course, been on the side of a literary career, and so David's work for the higher branch of the Civil Service was very much against the grain. About this time his first book was published. He had during his long walks at all times of the year, kept a minute diary of natural events—birds'-nesting, flowers opening, and descriptions of the sky, and clouds and atmosphere, and all sorts of observations made from day to day. This diary he offered on my father's advice to a firm which accepted it. I shall never forget my pride and joy when my copy of the book arrived, and how, in spite of my shyness in speaking to my employers of my own affairs, I rushed up to Mrs. Hayward to show her the book written by my lover and dedicated to my father. Mrs. Hayward admired my father's work, and the incident led to my telling her about David, and after that I had an interested and sympathetic friend in her.

Soon after this I left Broadstairs. My

## AS IT WAS

mother said she wanted me at home, and I did stay at home with her for a little while; but the old antagonism sprang up and I could not endure it for long. I very soon got another post as governess with a Mr. and Mrs. Scott, so that I should not be dependent on her.

She tried again to make me give up David, and forbade me to see him; so he could not come to the house. I lived at home, paying mother for my keep. Each evening David and I met, generally on Wandsworth Common, where afar off I would recognize him by his long swinging stride, even though with my short sight I could distinguish nothing else about him. Sometimes on these evenings he would just walk with me as far as my gate, but sometimes we would go to Wimbledon Common. It was on one of these summer evenings we had been talking of Richard Jefferies and his love for the human body. We had just read his essay, "Nature in the Louvre" and his description of the "Venus Accroupie," which he had admired so much. We were sitting in

## AS IT WAS

the undergrowth of a little copse in a remote part of the common. David had said that he had never seen a woman's body, and I do not remember quite how it came about, but I quite naturally and simply, without any feeling of shyness, knelt up in our secret bower and undid my clothes, and let them fall about my knees so that to the knees I was naked. I knew my body was pretty: my breasts were firm and round and neither too small nor too large, and my neck and shoulders made a pleasant line, and my arms were rounded and white, and though my hips were small, the line of the waist was lovely. I was proud of my body, and took the most innocent pleasure in its lines and health and strength. So we knelt in the grass and dead leaves of the copse opposite to each other, he silent and I laughing with joy to feel the air on my skin, and to see his enraptured gaze. For as he knelt he gazed wonderstruck and almost adoring, quite still, quite silent, looking now and then into my eyes with serious ecstatic look, his eyes full of tenderness and love, searching mine

## AS IT WAS

for any sign of regret or shyness. He did not touch me, but just knelt there letting his eyes take their fill of the beauty that was filling his soul with delight. When, without a word, I lifted my clothes about me, he helping me, he only then said, "Jenny, I did not know there was such beauty."

He told me as we walked home that no statue or picture of a nude woman had ever given him a true idea, and that it was a far more beautiful thing than he had thought. For though he loved the Greek statues, it seemed to him that my body was far lovelier. But that was only because a warm and living thing has beauty which a stone representation of the most perfect body can never have.

We were still very ignorant of sex, and only knew in a vague way through the reading of poetry how the human sexual act was performed. I remember very well with what joy I realized that his head would be on my breast, and I would enfold him in my arms.

After that, often when we were in remote

## AS IT WAS

places, I undressed and lay in the long grass, often beside the infant Wandle, then still an unpolluted stream. I had always from childhood had a love of feeling the air and sun on my body, and now—to be able often to have that experience and added to it the joy of my lover's delight—my heart was full indeed. He did not undress—at this time being shy—because he said his body would look so ugly beside mine, but he used to lie by me with one arm supporting his head while he read to me, the other over me, his hand wandering over my body as he read till it knew the curves as well as his eyes.

Desire had become more conscious and definite, and often in my breast I would experience a pleasurable pain of longing for I knew not what; I loved to feel his hand caressing me. After such a time he would help me to dress, kissing me as he did so, and I half-ashamed of his too great admiration, and wishing I was indeed all that he thought I was—wishing that I had perfect sight, wishing that my hair was not so straight and my nose was straighter, wishing that I

## AS IT WAS

could match his intellect and spirit, wishing that I had more to give him, and longing to give him all. But in spite of all that I knew to be imperfect in me I was utterly happy in his love, and hoped that in his heart he created beauty where none was, out of his love for me.

During these stolen hours we sometimes used to go to his home and read aloud, and sometimes we would go into town to the British Museum or the National Gallery, with Ruskin dictating our taste sometimes, and we finding it for ourselves too. Sometimes we would haunt Booksellers' Row—that queer little back street that used to lie behind the Strand—and spend a shilling or two on a second-hand copy of some book we wanted, or having saved up would buy a new volume of Ruskin in a good edition, of Shelley or Keats. Often we had no money, and could only turn the books over, and if we saw one we wanted hope that it would be there next time we came. Sometimes we would walk all the way home, along the Embankment and over Battersea Bridge

## AS IT WAS

and home through Clapham Junction. Or we would walk to Hampstead and look at Keats's house, and walk on the heath where David would be sure to find some unexpected wild flower, or hear a bird he did not think to hear there, or notice some beautiful effect of clouds or of smoke against the blue sky. All of this was a new aspect of life to me; for my eye readily caught the beauty of a group of red roofs, and the iron work of an old entrance gate, or the bend of a street of tall dignified houses, but nature was a sealed book to me until David taught me to see with new eyes and hear with new ears. And often I used to escape from home in the evening and go for little walks with him to fields and lanes whose existence so near home I had not dreamed of, and we would talk of life, and books, and love, and nature, and ourselves, and sometimes there was no need for talk—silence satisfied us more.

All this time he was working for his Civil Service examination, and I was going to and from my work. I liked my work, which was the care of an interesting little boy of four.

## AS IT WAS

His parents were foreigners; the father was a Russian aristocrat, fierce and cruel and tyrannous, and his mother was a most lovable Austrian. She and I became, while I worked for her, great friends. They lived in a luxurious suite of rooms at the Hotel Metropole. Sometimes I would be allowed to bring the little boy home, and then David would meet us, and we would go for a walk, he carrying the child on his shoulders, who would delight his mother on his return with the bunches of wild flowers which she and he would arrange in cups and saucers, there being no suitable vases in their grand rooms for such simple nosegays. They left England quite suddenly, making me promise I would return to them when they came back. I promised, for I loved the mother and little boy very much, but the man I hated, and he never paid me about £20 he owed me. So I got another job, this time a resident post in a very pleasant suburb of London. Here I was fairly well paid, and my work was light, still with children. David and I wrote to each other every day, and of



## AS IT WAS

course on my fixed free times we met. But I felt terribly lonely there, and the week which elapsed between our meetings seemed endless. The child was spoilt and difficult, and the mother an irritable, nervous, highly-strung creature, with a cigarette always in her mouth.

I felt a failure here, and that and my loneliness made me very unhappy. Mrs. Scott noticed, I suppose, that I was not happy, and very kindly questioned me about myself. So I told her about David, and she at once said that if I liked he could come and spend two evenings a week with me there in the room at the top of the house, which was the nursery during the day and my sitting-room at night. This made all the difference to me, and with increased happiness I could tackle my work better, and very soon the child and I were on the best of terms, and his parents congratulated me on the improvement in him. Affection and praise and encouragement were always to my soul what food is to the body, and in the atmosphere now so happy I know I was at

## AS IT WAS

my best, and no employers could have had a more devoted servant. It was my delight to take the child as far out into the country as I could in the time. We went—he in his pram—to Barnes Common and Richmond Park, and there I would tell him all my newly-acquired knowledge of birds and trees and flowers. Sometimes we would go in the other direction, along the towpath to Isleworth, and bring home bunches of meadow-sweet and loosestrife. Mrs. Scott was delighted that her child got taken to these places, and the child and I were never so happy as when picking bunches of flowers, or peering into gorse bushes for nests.

David used to come at about eight o'clock in the evening and stay till nine-thirty, and once a week I had the afternoon and evening free. Whenever the weather was good enough—and it had to be very bad to stop us—we used to walk on Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park, and go either to his home or mine for tea, for now my mother tolerated his presence. David was hating more and more the idea of the Civil Service

## AS IT WAS

as a means of earning his living, and at about this time, greatly to his father's anger, he gave up the work, and decided to try and earn his living by writing. Several of the literary weeklies were taking his essays, and his book had had a fair sale. His father, naturally enough, hated the precariousness of this way of living, and after a lot of discussion it was decided that David should go to Oxford, which his father thought would be a good start for any career that he took up. He decided to enter for a history scholarship, and as he had now left school some time, this required a good deal of reading. He liked the idea of going to the university, but dreaded it too, for he had had so very little social life and was so unused to meeting his fellows; and also the thought of the separation from me was hateful to think of.

We had often spoken of our life together, and had made great plans for the education of our children. We hated the thought of a legal contract. We felt our love was all the bond that there ought to be, and that if that

## AS IT WAS

failed it was immoral to be bound together. We wanted our union to be free and spontaneous. We had no idea when it should take place, but the thought of our approaching separation heightened our desire to be united in body as we were in heart and spirit.

My twentieth birthday drew near, and I was to have a whole holiday, which David and I were to spend on our favourite Wimbledon Common. We were to picnic there for lunch and tea, and go home to a birthday dinner in the evening. It was July and glorious weather. I had made myself a very pretty white frock, embroidered in flame-coloured silk. I wore a shady hat trimmed with the same colour. It suited me, and I know I looked as pretty as it was possible for me to look. I remember Mr. Scott's saying as I went out, "Why, Jenny, you look like a bride going to meet her bridegroom," and I remember blushing and feeling a great wave of passionate joy surging up in me, and I could hardly help laughing back at him, "I am, I am!" I was to bring the lunch, and David the tea, and I bought fruit and

## AS IT WAS

sandwiches and biscuits and some of our favourite Gruyère cheese and half a bottle of wine.

We met in the horrid, dark tunnel at Clapham Junction Station. He was there waiting for me, so tall, so distinguished from other men, dressed as always with a sort of carelessness that was not at all untidy, but just easy and individual. He was in his person scrupulously careful, and his large hands, which he used so well in all sorts of work, were always well kept. No lover could have pleased the eye more, no girl have been prouder of her man than I of mine, and the wonder of his loving me never left me. Our hearts were beating so, and our joy so intense, we could not speak, but just in that crowded place pressed each other's hands and walked side by side.

It did not take us long to get to the Common. In the solitude there we walked hand in hand, or David with his arm round my waist, and I with my hand over his hand, whose pressure under my breast made my whole body tender with desire. Our souls

## AS IT WAS

spreading their wings enfolded us in such dreamlike happiness that nothing disturbed our calm and our utter satisfaction. We talked as we sauntered along of what I should do while he was at Oxford, of our life together when he left, of my longing for children, of his ambitions in literature; and in this talk as in many others there was often hinted that deep spiritual unrest, which as yet we did not recognize, much less realize how it was to overshadow so much of his life and mine. All the beauty of the earth, the grass, the flaming gorse, the lark's song, the high cloudlets, the sweet air laden with the honey smell of gorse, seemed to be a part of our love. We could not speak of it, but as we stood to watch a bumble-bee make the gorse flower deliver its secret to him, he standing a little behind me, with his hands over my breasts, drew me to him and kissed me where my hair grew soft and curly under my ear. So I leaned smiling up at him, and he solemnly looking down at me, his eyes half-closed, his lovely mouth trembling from the kiss. So on, walking

## AS IT WAS

with hips moving together, laughing because of my short step and his long one. He picked a little bunch of flowers in the grass, white clover, yellow bedstraw and milkwort, and then remembered he had a birthday present for me. It was a brooch made of gold wire, twisted into a Celtic pattern, and when I had put my arms round his neck and kissed him for it, he pinned the flowers into the opening of my dress, which first he opened a little more to kiss the warm, soft swell of my breast, and while he kissed me I pressed his head yet further down into the warmth and sweetness there.

So we walked on into the remote part of the Common among the trees, until we came to a beautiful little pool, where moorhens and coots lived in the reeds, and where water voles dipped out of their holes in the low bank into the water, making a sound like cream being stirred. Here we sat and paddled our feet in the water and ate our lunch. We were so quiet that the timid water creatures grew bold and birds skimmed over the water, and a flaming dragon-fly

## AS IT WAS

darted in the air round and round us, as if weaving us in a web of rainbow colours. As we sat, David read to me some of the old ballads, "Edom O'Gordon" and "Chevy Chase" and "Sir Patrick Spens," he leaning against a beech tree and I leaning in the crook of his arm and shoulder, listening to his deep, clear voice, so quiet, so vibrating, so tender. I was caught up into heaven; all beauty, all love, all content were mine. Life gave me all it had to give. As I lay there in the bend of his arm, in the silence that the splash of the voles, and the song of the lark, and the sound of his voice did not disturb, the beating of his heart under my cheek lulled me to sleep, and my eyes were only opened by his kisses. He kissed my eyes, and my funny nose and my mouth and neck and my hands and feet. But I laughed at his serious kisses and pushed him away, and before he knew what I meant to do I had run away and hidden in a thicket of hazel and beech, and crouched down in the dry leaves. I heard his step rustling in the leaves, and I waited, trembling half with



## AS IT WAS

fear of his finding me, and half afraid I had hidden myself too well. But he came upon me before I knew he was near, and caught me up in his arms and carried me further and further into the little copse. I lay inert in his arms, conscious of nothing but his beating heart. Soon he came to a little glade in the copse, leafy and mossy and sunny, and putting me down, knelt in front of me and undid my hair, but finding it fell over my face he picked a trail of white bryony and made a fillet of it to keep my hair back. Then, keeping his eyes fixed so tenderly and seriously and passionately on mine, he undid my dress and took my arms out of the sleeves, and unfastened my underclothes, and slipped the shoulder-straps over my arms, so that I was naked to the waist, with my clothes lying round me. Then I held out my hands to him—for he was standing now, and he raised me to my feet, so that my clothes slid down in a ring. I stepped out of them on to the soft moss and dry leaves, and he kneeling kissed my body from my feet up to my knees, and from my knees up

## AS IT WAS

to my hips, and when he had kissed me and let his hand wander all over me he laid me down on the moss, and I lay with my eyes closed, just conscious that he was quickly undressing, and hearing his voice speaking some passionate name. And I knowing he was ready, opened my eyes and saw him standing there, said "Come," and drew him to my breast.

I only remember vaguely that the birthday dinner at home was very jolly and rollicking. My sisters were there, and my youngest sister's sweetheart—a man very much approved of by my mother and full of fun—a well-to-do and practical and a clever engineer. He was for ever scoring off me in some way, and tried to do the same with David, but he got as good as he gave, for David's wit was quick and penetrating, though he was not often moved to show it. We walked back over Wandsworth Common to Clapham Junction, talking at first happily enough of the books we should buy with the five pounds my mother had given me. I

## AS IT WAS

had seen, too, some old brass candlesticks, and a nice Morland print I had set my heart on buying him for his Oxford rooms. We kissed our good-night kiss on the dark Common, and David gave me to wear for a wedding ring the beautiful old signet ring which he wore—a red stone set in a very delicately designed gold setting. It had belonged to his great-grandfather, a Spanish sea-captain.

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### III

**D**URING August I went away with the Scotts to Sandgate, and I got to know the country about there very well, taking the child long walks on to the chalk hills behind, and along the coast to Dymchurch, and other villages in the Marsh. I forget when it was that David went in for a scholarship at Balliol and did not get it, and went in for one at Lincoln and did. I think it was while I was at Sandgate. However, I know that he was very soon to go to Oxford, when at the end of six weeks at Sandgate without any holiday I was given a few quite unexpected days' leave. It was too good a chance to be missed, and all in a hurry we decided to go away somewhere together for a tiny honeymoon. For me it was simple, but David had to invent some tale of having to go to Oxford or something. He was very

## AS IT WAS

eager to show me his beloved Wiltshire Downs, and so we decided to go to a little place he knew very well among the Downs just outside S——, and put up in the cottage of his old gamekeeper friend. All this we arranged in the greatest secrecy and joy. We took the train to S——, and from there walked, with our few belongings in rucksacks, the seven miles to the Downs. I shall never forget the wild excitement we felt at being all alone and free—no one knowing where we were, our time all our own. There was a little risk too that added to our enjoyment, for David's grandmother and aunt lived at S——, and he had often stayed with them, and was well known by quite a number of people. But we risked that, walking quickly through the town until we came to the solitary country road leading through a cleft in the Downs.

I do not remember the hamlet to which our cottage belonged, but of the cottage itself and its immediate surroundings I remember every detail. It stood like a fairy tale cottage right in a wood, and quite off

## AS IT WAS

the road, a track from the lane taking you to it. It had a deep thatched roof almost hiding the little windows of the bedrooms with its deep eaves, and a porch with a little bench on each side, covered with traveller's joy and briar roses that filled the air with their musky scent. It belonged to the wood, and the wood to it, as if it had been in reality the brown fur-covered creature that it looked, whose eyes peered out from under its overhanging brows shyly and kindly. All along under the thick untrimmed hedge of the garden was a row of beehives, one or two of the painted wooden new kind, but half a dozen or more of the old-fashioned skeps with earthenware pans inverted over them. The garden was full of bees and of flowers for them, red and blue and yellow. I had never seen anything so lovely, so exactly what I should have chosen for my honeymoon. The old man was full of fun, and he and his old wife, who welcomed us as though we were her children, could not make enough jokes at our expense. They had an enormous tea ready for us, of

## AS IT WAS

bacon and eggs and honey and lardy cakes and strong tea with cream in it, in the living-room of the cottage. This room had a flagged floor, with a big open range in it in which burned even at this time of the year a huge wood fire, the walls were covered with pictures and guns and traps. Bunches of herbs in paper bags hung from the raftered ceiling, for the old man was very proud of his herb medicines and ointments for men and beasts, and on a little table in the window, covered with a fox's skin, stood a huge Bible, and on the Bible a book in which he had written down all his prescriptions and remedies. He and David talked eagerly over old times of birds' nesting, and fishing in the huge reservoir near by. And there were jokes and nods and winks every now and then which we all laughed at. I was so glad they liked me, for they had known David since he was a little boy, and loved him, and I had felt afraid that I might not be the sort of girl they would like. But we got on splendidly. David sang some of the old songs in his clear deep voice, and then the old man sang

## AS IT WAS

some that he knew, "The Farmer's Boy" and "Turmot Hoeing" and "The Seeds of Love," and we all joined in at the chorus. Just before bed-time the old woman brought out a bottle of mead, made from their own honey, I do not know how many years ago. It was like cloudy amber to look at, and had the softest, most subtle taste you can imagine. We drank it like a liqueur. It was very strong, and they were delighted that we liked it, and took it as a compliment that we dared not drink much of it—though they tried to make us, telling us it was a right proper drink for lovers. They told me I must call them Dad and Granny as David had always done, and they called me Mrs. Davy.

Our bedroom was just as right as all the rest of the cottage was—a small room almost filled by the four-poster, with such a thick mattress, and feather bed on it, covered with a patchwork quilt, that I had to climb on a chair before I could get into bed. The hangings of the bed were chintz in a pattern of the rose, the shamrock, and the thistle, all



## AS IT WAS

in bright colours. There was a little dressing-table with a white dimity flounce all round it, and a little corner washstand. The tiny window was draped with dimity curtains, and the window was kept open by a large dried sunflower head. The scent of the briar rose over the porch mingled with the smell of lavender, of which there were two vases full on the dressing-table. Everything was enchanting, I had never been in such a cottage before. David was as happy as I, and overjoyed at my delight. It was so lovely, too, to be together like this. So little of our courtship and love-making had been indoors, and it was a delicious experience to be together in this sweet little room, all to ourselves, chatting and laughing together, unpacking our rucksacks, and finding places for our things all so intimate and homely. We washed in rain-water, and even the rough towel smelt sweet. Outside the owls hooted about the cottage, and bats twittered, and starlings stirred in the thatch. No other sound was to be heard, no trams, no people, no traffic, nothing but the sounds that do

## AS IT WAS

not spoil silence, but rather deepen it, and a little breeze wandering through the wood, and a leaf flapping against our window.

As we stood together by the window sniffing the sweet air, and looking into the dark wood, David took the pins out of my hair, and when I was going to plait it into two plaits he said: "No, let it be loose." I got into bed first and sank down into the thick feather bed. All night we were to be together, and all day, and all day and all night again. I sighed a deep sigh of content and happiness. "Happy?" David asked, as he blew out the candle and got in beside me and took me in his arms

David was awake early and, half-dressed, went down to the reservoir to bathe. As soon as he was gone, Granny came up with a huge cup of tea, and a tiny doll's loaf just out of the oven on a plate for me. While I sat up and ate and drank she stood talking to me about David, and her sons, and her young days; how Dad was a bit wild when he was young; and how she had had to work hard to keep things going, though many's

## AS IT WAS

the time she and the children had sat down to a dish of boiled turnips and bread for their dinner, and not much bread either, for flour was dear. But though he had been a bit wild he had never been unkind to her and the boys, and as he got older he settled down, and they had been very happy ever since. She told me they loved David as much as their own boys, and showed me letters that they had had from him when he was a little boy, and a handkerchief, bought and chosen by himself, which David had sent her one Christmas many years ago. We were gossiping away when we heard David's step, and he called to me from the garden to come out. So Granny left me to get dressed saying, with a wink, "Drat the men, they never leave a poor woman in peace," and we laughed at the joke. But I knew that all my life my only peace would be to be needed by him. And so it was.

For there were to come dark days when his brooding melancholy shut me out in a lonely exile, and my heart waited too eagerly to be let into the light again. When those

## AS IT WAS

days came, with no apparent reason for their coming, bringing to him a deep spiritual unrest and discontent, he would be silent for hours, and perhaps stride out of the house, angry and bitter and cruel, and walk and walk far into the night, and come home worn out with deadly fatigue. When those days came my heart trembled for what might happen, and I, suffering his terrible spiritual loneliness, had no thought, or seeing, or hearing, for anything but his agony and my own despair. Then my strong body that he loved so came to my rescue, and in hard housework, scrubbing and washing and digging in the garden, I would force myself to *be*, so that when the cloud left him he would find me to welcome him. I did these things mechanically—cooked the food, took the children out walks, spoke to them, picked flowers with them, but I did not know afterwards what I had done while my spirit waited in the dark.

But this was to come, and it was only now and then that I had hints of this darkness in his soul, this fierce unrest which beyond all

## AS IT WAS

found peace in Nature, but not in me. Alone he had to be in his agony, but when he emerged from it, exhausted by God knows what bitter contest, he looked for me and needed me, and our love was always the firm ground on which we stood secure and that no storm ever swept away.

But now I washed and dressed and ran down, and as I ran through the kitchen where Granny was cooking the breakfast she shooed me away—"Get along, you hussy," she said.

All that day we were out, fishing in the reservoir, and bathing in it and walking in the deep woods, not talking much as I remember. We brought home some perch for supper, which Granny pretended to be cross with David for bringing—"Such trashy fish, all scales and guts," she said. But she cooked them, and while we ate them David read how Izaak Walton would have cooked them, to tease Granny with the white wine and this and that ungettable spice. When Dad came in he brought a dead jay so that I could have the beautiful wing for a hat. I didn't

## AS IT WAS

like to think of the lovely bird being killed for such a purpose, but I kept that to myself, knowing it would be incomprehensible to him, and appreciating his kind thought for me. After tea Dad showed me the garden and the beehives, and all the bees swarming over the comb. They filled me with disgust. They are such ugly creatures in a mass like that, and their highly developed social life, so ordered, so cold, so lacking in impulse, repelled me then as it does now. Dad laughed when I tried to tell him how I felt about them. "Ah, but what about the mead and the honey?" he said, and, of course, I said, "Yes, I like that," but I could only regard bees almost as one does machinery. But I loved the hermit, home-making bumble bees—humble bees of the earth, primitive and indolent and beautiful.

While Dad and I had been flirting over the bees and flowers, and his collection of dried skins of ferret and weasel and rabbit and squirrel, David was helping Granny to wash up, much to her amusement and delight, and she had tied her long white apron

## AS IT WAS

round him. At the end of our little round he said, "Now give your old Dad a kiss, but don't tell that boy of yourn, for I be no fighter these days." So I kissed him and promised I wouldn't tell, and we had our little secret; but Dad, with such winks and significant looks, soon let the cat out of the bag, and all had to be confessed. Then David had to kiss Granny to make it quits, and we were very happy together with our jokes and fun. I had never met people like these before, and though the things they said sometimes startled me because they were so new to me, their coarse, simple talk full of proverbs, and shrewd observation and wit did not shock me at all. I felt perfectly at home with them, and knew that they didn't feel they had to make a difference for me, but were with me as they had always been with David. He was glad too, I could see. I loved them just as I love the earth, and the rain, and the bumble bees.

After we had all had some mead, Dad and Granny got very jolly and gay, and Granny rose and began to dance and said,

## AS IT WAS

"I be as young as any, b'aint I, Dad?" and Dad said of course she was, and they danced together hand-in-hand up and down the kitchen, Granny holding up her apron and Dad looking at her with admiration. And as they danced some old dance they had remembered from their courting days, David whistled the tune, for he was too shy to dance, and so was I. I wonder when again that lovely old tune was whistled in that cottage, and when again that jig was danced under that roof, for those who danced are dead, and he who whistled the tune is dead, and I think that those who live in that cottage now have forgotten these old things, as soon all will have forgotten them. So we lay another night in the great bed, and slept in each other's arms, slept the sound sleep that lovers sleep, so sound and yet so light that like a dream the consciousness of the other is always there—the only dream that enters the deep sleep of lovers.

After breakfast we had to leave, and Dad was already to go with us as far as the market-place in the town where he had



## AS IT WAS

business. Dear old Granny had all ready for me a little neatly arranged posy of all the sweet-smelling flowers and herbs from the garden—an outside fringe of “old man” and for the middle a tight pink rosebud with a circle of mint. She said it was for us to smell in London and be reminded of them and the garden. As if I should ever forget them, though I have never seen them again! They insisted on our taking a pot of honey, and half a dozen of big apples and two great lardy cakes, and Granny gave me a length of fine crochet lace that she had made long ago, with much joking and looking sideways at David, and he pretending he didn’t know what on earth she meant by all her hints. Dad gave David a little old book of receipts he had collected for food, for medicine for beast and man, for curing skins, and all sorts of things. All these with difficulty we packed into our rucksacks, and off we set, with Dad insisting on carrying our traps, and Granny waving to us from the gate.

And soon in the train we left the long line

## AS IT WAS

of downs behind us, and were in London.

I have passed those downs since and have seen the places where we walked, and from the train have found, as David showed me how, the glint of the sun on the reservoir where we bathed. I have never stayed there again, but I know the place as I know no other. I have my jay's wing still. I never put it in a hat, but the lace I used again and again on my babies' clothes, and it has never worn out.

Then David went to Oxford, and I stayed on in my job. We wrote to each other every day, and his letters were full of his new life, and I could tell how he was enjoying the society of his fellows, and also the freedom from home rules which he experienced for the first time in his life. He had always been kept very short of money, and it was quite a new experience to have a small allowance to manage himself. Of course, he thought it would do much more than was possible. He loved beautiful things, and his own home was so devoid of beauty, and he at once went the way of, I suppose, most under-

## AS IT WAS

graduates. He spent in his first year much more than he could afford on editions de luxe, pictures, and china. I was always on the look-out for odds and ends for his rooms—brass, and pewter, and bright cushions, and books all the time as I could afford. He now read Pater, and Oscar Wilde, and John Addington Symonds. It was the *Yellow Book* period, and he was very interested in the movement, though never carried away by it. I was rather repelled by it, though as I was young and healthy something in its breaking away from the old conventions appealed to me. I read *The Woman Who Did*, but having done likewise I was not impressed by it—it seemed to me a lot of fuss about nothing. I detested Aubrey Beardsley's drawings and loved Max Beerbohm's essays as they appeared in the *Yellow Book*. It was an interesting time to be growing up in, and David and I were both quick to respond to any new ideas in art and literature. But David was much more influenced by the old than the new, and I think *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and *Urn Burial*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Lear*

## AS IT WAS

and *Macbeth*, and Keats and the Bible, to name a few, were the foundations of his taste. These were the books we read at the same time, and in our letters we wrote about them and about ourselves and our love and our future life together

At this time I became an intimate of a circle of people living in Hammersmith. The centre of the circle was a friend of Mrs. Scott's, but it was through an old friend of mine that I was introduced to it—her name was Mrs. Halliday. They were artistic Bohemian people, young mostly, though Mrs. Halliday was not. She had three lovely daughters, the eldest about sixteen or seventeen when I first knew them. This household and their ways were a revelation to me. I loved their large spacious rooms with very little furniture in them, the polished floors bare except for a rug or two, and the almost bare walls; the absence of stuffy upholstery and curtains, and the simple beauty and comfort of everything delighted me. I had, of course, read William Morris and been very attracted by his ideas, but I had never

## AS IT WAS

before seen a house decorated and furnished with his designs and in the way he advocated. The beauty of it delighted me, and I thought it the perfect setting for these people, with their freedom of manner and thought. The house was always full of men and women living in delightful freedom of intercourse—all people interested in some form of art from Church embroidery to acting. There was a poet who has since achieved fame, an actor who is at the top of the tree, a painter who is now an acknowledged master, and several notable craftsmen whose work is now known to connoisseurs. Folk songs were just being collected, and it was here I first heard these beautiful old songs being sung. They were eager, enthusiastic people, and I admired them immensely. I look back upon this household as having been—after David—the strongest influence in my life. It opened new windows for me on the social and artistic world, a world I was strangely unfamiliar with, and because they liked me I felt at ease with them and found pleasure in talking to them, and looked forward to

## *AS IT WAS*

the discussions which took place in their beautiful drawing-room. There were no servants; but everyone, men and women, helped in the house, and everything ran smoothly.

I introduced David to these people, but he didn't get on with them. He was too reserved, and sat among them like some judging Sphinx. But I, being so much simpler, and so frankly admiring, was accepted at once. I was often there when David was at Oxford, a humble disciple of what seemed to me a higher ideal of freedom than I had ever imagined possible. David used to make fun of their serious cults of purity and freedom and nakedness, but I thought it very fine, and admired and loved them. They regarded no convention, and I did not see till later that their unconvention was almost as intolerant as my parents' convention. But they were kind and gracious people, and proved good friends to me when I needed friends, which I was soon to do.

I cannot quite remember how events hurried on, but I think the estrangement

## AS IT WAS

between Mrs. Scott and Beatrice did not happen till David had been at Oxford some time, and I cannot remember individual vacations. Mrs. Scott disliked my going to Beatrice, and because I would go she became suspicious, and after a while I found that she had been reading David's letters to me. She never confessed that she had done this, and I could never prove it, but I gathered that she had discovered what our relationship was. So I asked the advice of Beatrice, who of course knew that David and I were lovers, and she advised me to leave, and offered me a post in her own household, which I gladly accepted. My duties were to do anything that wanted doing, and included cooking and house-keeping, as well as sewing and helping the children with their lessons. David did not wholly like this, but it had certain very great advantages. I was with friends, and as long as certain things were done I was free to come and go as I liked. David in his vacations spent a good deal of time here, and gradually got on better with the circle, who

## AS IT WAS

welcomed him and found him an interesting and stimulating participator in their discussions about art and life. But though he got to know and like them better, and they him, something always kept them from becoming intimate. Here I had a very nice room of my own, half bedroom, half sitting-room, where David often spent the night with me. From here, too, we had many lovely days in the country, though we never had another chance to go to our honeymoon cottage, for the old couple had had to leave it, and had moved into the town, near the railway works which employed their son.

So here I lived a jolly Bohemian life, working hard, and liking and being liked by the people I mixed with. I would have done anything for Beatrice, and did, in fact, work very hard at anything that came along to be done. The eldest girl was on the stage—a very beautiful and very selfish girl, and I was the one person she had some consideration for. She knew how I admired her beauty, especially her lovely hair, which I used to brush for her, and my natural good temper



## AS IT WAS

somehow softened her hard, spoilt heart. Her beauty was to bring her nothing but unhappiness, and I saw it coming, and so used to mother her, and she who was so imperious to her own mother used to be yielding to me.

All this time David was working fairly hard at Oxford, and rowing for his College, and experimenting in all sorts of experiences. He tried alcohol and opium, and used to write to me and tell me everything that he went through in these various phases. He was influenced by the æsthetic school, and his dress and taste in colour and design were all very much affected by that. He had made a large number of friends, many of whom he kept all his life. He had a wonderful capacity for friendship, and inspired love and admiration wherever he went. He exacted a great deal, and gave a great deal.

He was enjoying it all enormously, and this life helped to overcome his natural shyness and reserve. He never wore his heart on his sleeve, as I did, and people had to meet him more than half-way, but this they

## AS IT WAS

always found worth doing. He was earning about £80 a year by writing. He became a more or less regular contributor to *The Speaker*, *The Academy*, and *The Literary World*, so that his life was very full. His style was at this time very much influenced by Pater, and he wrote, besides nature studies, romantic and imaginative essays in an ornate precious style which he afterwards dropped entirely. His writing was always full of a deep melancholy; even in his Oxford days this melancholy and spiritual disquietude were becoming more and more characteristic of his temperament.

He had been at Oxford two years, when, shortly after the end of the spring vacation, I found I was pregnant.

## IV

IT was May, and we had been in the country on the outskirts of London; and coming back that evening—by what secret sign I cannot tell—I knew what had happened to me. I did not tell David, because it was not by reason that I became aware of this, but by something deeper that my mind had no conscious part in. I realized that a calm, deep, secret joy had entered into my spirit. It was not an excited joy at first—for what had happened seemed to me natural and right—that, just as out of friendship had come love, so from love would come a child. It was as it could not help but be, and I felt content and happy with a sense of fulfilment.

David returned to Oxford, and in a week or two I wrote to tell him. He wrote to me anxiously to come to Oxford. My serenity

## AS IT WAS

and complete acceptance seemed wonderful to him. He was anxious and troubled, and his letters were full of tender passion. All he wanted was for me to go to him, so that he could see for himself if indeed I was as happy and untroubled as over and over again I told him. So I went.

He met me at Oxford Station. We wanted to talk and be alone; so he did not take me through the city—which I saw for the first time many years afterwards when he was dead—but along by the canal, and on by the river. We walked several miles by the river, until we came to a wide meadow enclosed by thick high hedges now all in their spring green and white, and full of cowslips. Never before had I seen cowslips growing, and as I buried my face in their cool freshness and smelt their honey smell, and heard the bees humming in and out of the flowers, I felt my identification with the earth, which in its spring fulfilled itself with grass and cowslips and bees, as I with my baby fulfilled myself.

We sat in the shade of the hedge and ate

## AS IT WAS

our lunch, which David had brought with him, and afterwards David picked bunches of cowslips and spilt them all over me, my hair, my shoulders, my lap, and pulled more and more to bury me with. His anxieties had gone, and as I lay in his arms he told me how he had never loved me so much as now; how he had feared he might see some tiny shadow of fear or reproach or anxiety that would be there, however much I tried to conceal it; how, when with my first kiss and look and word I had dispelled all his fears, the warmth of love and joy and passion rushed in where the coldness of fear had been.

We talked happily of what had come to us. We decided to tell no one but Beatrice. We were jealous of our secret, and I particularly did not want anyone else to share it just yet. We did not talk much of the future, or plan anything, except that David would try to increase his earnings by more regular work for the papers which were taking his things. I was happy with Beatrice and her household, and did not want to leave her yet. But now we both felt we must

## AS IT WAS

be more together, though how it was to come about we did not know. But I was as calm and sure about that as about everything. Care and fear for the future had no place in my consciousness, and whenever fear and anxiety came to David I was able to soothe and reassure him. The months of which this was the beginning were for me especially lovely, because David needed and took from me what I had so much of to give him—a serenity rich and vital like the serenity of the earth. Very soon there came to me the full significance of maternity, and when during these months David was troubled, I had the strange experience which I expect most women have, who are in love, of an eternal tenderness as old and wise as the earth, almost a physical sensation of being big and strong to comfort and protect. He was my child, and I the ancient ageless mother in whose arms was unfailing comfort, and in her heart the deep wisdom of the earth.

I left in the early evening. For long, long afterwards, when I thought of Oxford, that

## AS IT WAS

murmuring sea of green meadow grass with golden froth of cowslips came into my mind, with the thin strip of the Thames dividing it from the grey mist out of which the spires and towers and domes of the city rose.

David and I had not spoken of marriage. Indeed, it had not occurred to us. At about this time I came into possession of £250—all that remained of a considerable legacy left to each of my sisters and myself, which had been stolen by the trustee. The thing had just come to light, and the sum of £250 each was all that could be recovered. This seemed to me a great deal of money, and coming just then it was like a miracle. It removed any anxiety on that score. Not that I had felt any—nothing could disturb the deep serenity of my being—but I was glad for David's peace of mind that this money came then. My calm spirit was only equalled by a wonderful glow of physical well-being, and it was difficult for me to find even the hard work I had to do in Beatrice's house sufficient for my overflowing energy.

## AS IT WAS

I noticed with joy my breasts growing larger and my body changing its shape.

During this time David came to London once or twice to see me, and now I used to try to imagine him a father—this tall, fair man, so young, so handsome, so grave, so elegant—tasting for the first time the freedom and pleasure of a university. He was going through the phase of being influenced in his tastes by Wilde and Pater, and this appeared in his dress, which was individual and scrupulous without being either freakish or dandified. Now, as always before and always after, his love for, and need of, nature was the same. Whenever he came, we spent the day out of London, he tenderly careful of me now, lifting me over gates we had to climb, and calling at farmhouses for glasses of milk. We talked of our baby and of our future life. He told me what to read—Chaucer and Shakespeare and Wordsworth More's *Utopia* and Plato's *Republic*, I remember, I now read for the first time. I was to go to the National Gallery, and choose one or two satisfying pictures, and fill myself with



## AS IT WAS

their beauty. But most of all, I was to go into the country as often as I could, and lie in the grass and look at the clouds, and become familiar with the life in the hedges and trees, and with the solitude and the silence. I read the books and enjoyed them, but I got tired of the pictures: I had in my heart always the picture of my lover, and I longed passionately for a boy like him. I remember at about this time feeling the first flutter of my baby in my womb. It was as if he spoke to me, and I was thrilled with joy and pleasure, with this intimate and direct communication between us. I loved to feel him striving within me.

On one of David's visits we decided to tell Beatrice. To my surprise and disappointment Beatrice, now as ever affectionately sympathetic and interested, strongly advised marriage. Perhaps she felt she had unduly influenced me against marriage, and she did not like having that responsibility. She put before us very wisely and carefully the argument for marriage. It was I who most

## AS IT WAS

strongly opposed this; so she weighted her argument with reasons which she thought would most easily convince me. They did not convince me, but David was sure that Beatrice was right. When we went to bed I cried and cried, and distressed David very much, who had never seen such tears. He did all he could to comfort me with wise and tender talk, quietly insisting that our love was our own and that no one could interfere with it or spoil it but we ourselves, and telling me that free love was only another bondage, a new thought-out idea with no tradition of human wisdom behind it. After a while he kissed my wet eyes shut, and in the morning I woke happy and comforted.

All this time I was keeping in touch with my home, and I went to see my mother fairly often. I had now very little in common with my family, but though my sisters and I were in most things strangers to each other we always felt very strongly the tie of family affection.

There came to stay with Beatrice a great

## AS IT WAS

friend of mine named Joan Hunter. She and I had grown up together and had been very intimate. She and her husband and David and I got on splendidly together, and they were also intimate with Beatrice. For convenience she and I shared the same room, and when we were undressing at night she noticed my altered figure, and I told her. To my great grief she was indignant and angry. And as we lay side by side in bed she said many hard and bitter things to me. Chiefly she accused me of deceit in having kept my relationship to David so secret even from her, my oldest friend. I was sorry she felt like that, but I could not feel I had done wrong in this. Next she drew a picture of what this would mean to my mother and sisters, and how our baby would suffer. In excited and angry words she called me selfish and self-indulgent. I was utterly overwhelmed by the torrent of her words. She seemed to want to hurt me, and I shrank from her, sobbing uncontrollably. She, noticing my movement away from her, said, "You see, you are ashamed. You know you have done

## AS IT WAS

wrong." And I, in my violent and now hysterical sobbing, could only cry, "No, no, no." My body became so convulsed with my crying that she began to be alarmed and tried to calm me, telling me to think of the harm I might be doing the baby, and that she was my friend, and had only been saying what she thought was for my good. She put her arm round me to comfort me, and whether in doing so she felt my altered shape I do not know, but suddenly all was changed: from a scolding teacher she became a sweet friend again, full of love and sympathy and interest, and I, who responded so quickly to warmth and affection, pressed up to her, and soon we were talking of plans and baby clothes and names.

I can't remember this time very clearly—only that I was very happy among these kind people. One of the many frequenters of the house, an artist, had a house on Chiswick Mall, with a lovely old garden behind and a great spreading mulberry tree in it. Here a little company of friends used to gather—a poet, half-gipsy, whom I liked best;

## AS IT WAS

a painter; an actor; and one of two craftsmen: and they would talk, and I would sit and sew and listen enraptured with their ideas and gaiety and enthusiasm. David came to this garden once or twice, and was one of the best of the talkers.

This artist had designed for me a beautiful dress, which Beatrice made for me. It was of my favourite flame colour, and was embroidered in blue, and the coat was lined with blue silk. She was a very clever dress-maker, and I was delighted with it, and kept it to surprise David with on our wedding day, which was now very near. We had very little money, for we were carefully hoarding the £250, and so we were glad to find a shop where we could buy a wedding ring for eight shillings.

In June we were married. Joan and her husband and one or two of our Hammer-smith friends came to the registry office.

Very soon after this things became rather complicated. Beatrice's divorce was coming on, and she was giving up for a time the house in Hammersmith, and David and I

## AS IT WAS

did not quite know what to do. Joan and her husband invited me to stay with them, and as it was David's vacation, during which he was reading hard, he stayed at home. The Hunters lived in a flat near the Crystal Palace, and there I went with my few belongings. I was very sorry indeed to leave Beatrice and the friends I had made there, and I believe they were sorry too. With some of them I kept in touch for many years, but others I did not see again. In their various ways they became well known, and I was glad when I saw their names in appreciative notices.

This visit to the Hunters was to be only temporary—I had quite other plans. I wanted more than anything to be out in the country, and with my little capital it seemed to be quite easy. David also desired this for me and himself, for we hoped that we should be able to be together in his vacations.

I had, years ago at Broadstairs, met a nurse who lived, I knew, at Esher. I had made friends with her, and she had said that if ever I had a baby she would be my nurse.

## AS IT WAS

So to her I went. My idea was to take rooms in a cottage in Esher—which was then a pretty little village—and so be near her when my time came. Here David could come, and here when he was at Oxford I could occupy my time in reading and sewing and walking, and writing my daily letter to him. David and I went there one afternoon and met the nurse, who recommended us to just the rooms we wanted. The cottage had a clear view of the downs, and the two rooms were neat and clean and simple. The front door opened into the sitting-room, and the bedroom was above it. The rooms were real cottage rooms, not of the furnished-lodging type, and the woman was a nice motherly creature of about thirty-five, with one little boy. We took an instant liking to each other, and she was interested in our affairs, and quite willing for my baby to be born there.

David, though so reserved and quiet, always got on well with simple, natural people. I don't quite know what it was that attracted them to him: whether it was his

## AS IT WAS

looks, or the quiet humour that these people always brought out in him—or whether it was the instinctive knowledge of his love for the earth, and those racy, natural qualities which are so near the earth—that made them feel at home with him at once. But there it was—we were soon chatting together in her kitchen, hung round with coloured prints of famous racehorses, for her husband was a stableman in the racing stables near by, and her little boy was destined to be a jockey. So we left mightily pleased with our day's work, and I all agog to move into my new home.

As yet neither David's people nor mine had any knowledge of our union, and I wished very much that they need not know till my baby was born. I knew that directly our secret was out all sorts of things would rush in and disturb the wonderful and happy calm, and thus I dreaded. So far David and I had never had to explain or justify ourselves to anyone, and to each other there had been no thought of such a thing. What would be thought queer by others was just natural



## AS IT WAS

and right for us. Our cottage woman took it all without comment or question; but I knew it would not be so with others. David would be blamed for my sake, I for his, and both for the baby's. Our affairs would all be put under the microscope and distorted, and all would at the best be "queer," and the worst wicked. I thought if we could only wait until my baby was born there would be nothing to discuss. Our parents would accept a living baby in a way they could not accept my being pregnant, and David a married undergraduate. They would fall into my living alone at Esher till David left Oxford the easier when I was firmly established there. A hint of all this had been given us by the Hunters, who thought the Esher scheme quite mad

I had no reasons to bring to people in support of my desire for the country and the continuation of our blessed isolation from the jangle and confusion of family discussion, and so I was soon argued into acceptance. David who did not, could not, share my calm happiness, was eager to listen

## AS IT WAS

to the advice of our friends as to what was best, the more so because dimly he perceived that I had withdrawn into an inner room of my spirit, into which no one, not even he, could enter. A cocoon had, as it were, spun itself about me, and secretly inside I waited. So all the more he felt things must be arranged for me and action taken. His parents were told, and his mother at once came over to see me, and could not have been kinder. She at once accepted me as her daughter, and though she regarded it all as a disaster she uttered no blame or reproach. I was very touched by her sad acceptance of it all, and her concern for me. As I had feared, she would not hear of my being alone at Esher, but insisted that I should come to live with them. I appreciated the kind consideration of this, but I was terribly disappointed that the Esher plan had to be abandoned. However, so it was, and it did not seem to matter. My sanctuary was still inviolate.

My own mother behaved very differently. We had always been antagonistic, and all I could feel during the scenes which took

## AS IT WAS

place was sorrow that she should have had such an uncongenial daughter, and a certain relief that at last we knew without any reserves at all that we were strangers speaking different tongues. I wrote to my sisters. From the youngest I got a very sweet letter saying she had always hoped to be an aunt, and though disapproving, still warm and affectionate. This letter touched and pleased me very much.

So I again moved my home and went to live with the Townsends, in conditions the exact opposite to anything I had wanted. Only Mrs. Townsend's generous kindness, which even her deep reserve and sadness could not hide, made the prospect tolerable. I was reintroduced to David's brothers as their new sister. I helped in the house, though a big strong Welsh woman did not leave much to be done. The huge batches of bread and cakes that she baked every Friday amazed me, as did the huge joints of meat that were carved by their mother for the boys. I got on very well with them all, though the atmosphere was very uncon-

## AS IT WAS

genial to me—Mr. Townsend, when not at his office, wrapt up in his studies, and quite unsympathetic towards his boys, who openly despised him; Mrs. Townsend, reserved and sad, suffering for lack of any social life, devoted to her boys, who were strangers to her. How different it was from my own home life before my father's death, so united, so jolly, so varied, or from Beatrice's household, where freedom and tolerance and sympathy overwhelmed the fierce Bohemianism. But I was well and happy. The chilling atmosphere of the house, created, I suppose, by the strange disharmony of everyone in it, could not chill me, though it was entirely foreign to me, and would have been painful to me had I not been irradiated by my love and my secret joy. The boys, after the first surprise and curiosity, accepted me, and were in their way fond of me, and I of them. They, with their rough ways, their comings and goings, no one knew where, their seeming indifference to their parents, the entire absence of communion even with each other, surprised and puzzled me. I helped with

## AS IT WAS

huge piles of mending, and in the evening after the last meal, if Mr. Townsend was not going to a political meeting or a lecture, he and Mrs. Townsend and I would sit in the little sitting-room, and I would sew my baby clothes, and Mr. Townsend would read aloud. If he went out, Mrs. Townsend and I did not read, but talked together as intimately as it was possible with so shy and reserved a woman. I never really penetrated that reserve of hers; sometimes I thought I had, when my happiness overflowed and gave me courage to take her by storm, and kiss her and tease her, and tell her how pretty she was, for she still bore traces of having been a lovely girl. So I would, perhaps, be able to coax her out of her shell for a little while, but soon she would turn away with a sigh and shut me out again.

The day which she and I in our different ways looked forward to was the day David came back from Oxford. David and his mother understood and loved each other. He of all her sons was like her. He was like her in looks and temperament; for though

## AS IT WAS

he needed and loved my impulsive and demonstrative nature, these qualities were foreign to him as they were to her. This reserve and melancholy grew as he grew. Now, overwhelmed by the high hopes and the passion of youth, I had no more than caught glimpses of it, but in after years it became at times a darkness about his soul which I could not enter, nor my love light.

While I was with the Townsends he came home for his vacation twice, but it is the December one that I particularly remember. Ann made a great doughy cake, I helping to knead the currants and sugar and butter into the dough; and I cleaned and polished our room at the top of the house. As the time got near for his arrival I sat down by the fire in the little old rocking-chair, with the kettle on the hob and the tea things ready, and even the slices of bread cut ready for the hot buttered toast. At last I heard his cab drive up, and the bang of the street door, and the murmur of voices for what seemed a long time, and then his step on the staircase—great steps taking two stairs each time.

## AS IT WAS

For one panic-stricken moment I wondered would he realize that by now I was very big, and then he was in the room and I in his arms. Then with his old, lovely gesture he pushed the hair from my forehead and looked into my eyes and said, "Happy?" and I nodded, no words coming for my great happiness. Then we had tea, at which his mother joined us, afraid she was intruding though we insisted she was not. She did not know what to make of it when I told David I knew my baby was a boy—he kicked so—and David put his hand where he could feel him moving so strongly. I asked him if he had expected to see me so big, and he said, "No, not quite so large and proud—but it suits her, doesn't it, mother? and her face is still round and pink. I've got a present for you—I don't know what you'll do with it, but it has such a beautiful name, and looked so lovely in the shop, it reminded me of those cowslips—do you remember? I thought you could make something out of it—a little jacket for when you are in bed perhaps."

## AS IT WAS

Then he showed me a length of crêpe de Chine. It was quite a new material then, and I had never handled it before. It was heavy and soft and rich, and in the folds it glowed deep golden. He held it against my face, and said it suited my dark brown hair and eyes. Mrs. Townsend was pleased and shocked at his extravagance, and sighed because life would not always be like that for us. I was delighted with the beautiful stuff, and thought I could never bear to cut it. But most of all I loved to think of David's going into the shop and buying this costly stuff for me because it reminded him of those cowslips.

Our life was very quiet and uneventful. We walked on the Common every day, and sometimes got as far as our beloved Wimbledon Common, for I still felt very well and active, and walking with him was my greatest pleasure. Indoors he had a good deal of reading and writing to do, for he had a certain amount of regular reviewing. While he worked, I sat in the little chair and sewed or read. But when I think of this time it is



## AS IT WAS

chiefly those teas by the fire that I remember, and later, when David turned out the lamp and the fire still glowed red, we lay in bed talking of our life together, and our baby and David's work, until with his arm round me, and me holding his thumb tight in my fist, we fell asleep.

During this vacation I met one of David's Oxford friends. He was a Balliol scholar, and though very different, David and he became very friendly, and David wanted me to meet him. So we met in Hyde Park. He was a brilliant talker and experienced in things of which I had no knowledge. But I got on quite well with him, and he liked me, and we were all easy together. His cynicism disturbed me. Still I was so interested in people that I did not dislike him for it. I thought it strange for him to say things which I felt sure he did not feel. I had not heard this kind of talk before, and I was puzzled by it, taking it seriously, as I did everything. Humour I was familiar with, and could understand and enjoy, but this sharp, cold wit was different, and I had to learn to ap-

## AS IT WAS

preciate that. To me he was kind and courteous, though I expect he was amused by my grave talk; and his evident affection and admiration of David quite won my heart, and David was well pleased with this, my first introduction to his Oxford friends

Christmas passed and January came. I had nothing left to do. All my baby clothes were made and arranged neatly in the drawer, the cradle was covered with white muslin and made ready for its occupant, with frilled pillow and fleecy blankets and blue eider-down. I could only wait, and began to wonder anxiously if my baby would be born before David had to return to Oxford. The serenity that nothing had been able to disturb during these nine months began to give way to impatience and a sort of excited activity. We still went for our daily walks, but indoors I could not now sit and read, but forever had to be arranging and rearranging the room and the baby's things in the drawer. My baby lay quiet, and I felt lonely. As before I had felt alone with my joy, so now I felt alone with this strange

## *AS IT WAS*

excitement; but whereas before I had been content in my solitude, now my spirit as it were paced backwards and forwards, impatiently resentful of this loneliness which shut it in like a cage.

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## V

**B**UT I had not long to wait. The New Year was still quite new when one night I woke up and knew that at last my baby was making ready for his mysterious entrance into life. I held my breath and waited, for I was not quite sure what it was that had wakened me, and conveyed to me so surely that my time was come.

It came again—a small, sharp pain. For a little while I lay quite still, too moved by its significance to turn and speak to David by my side. I must be quiet awhile with my baby—he in the dark mystery of my body, and I in the dark mystery of my soul—our bond, and the breaking of that bond made manifest by the small, sharp pain that came again.

I felt his shape in my great belly, and closed my eyes in the darkness, that in such

## AS IT WAS

double dark I might see him as I had so often seen him thus, turning and trying his strength, and beating against the tender wall of his prison. He did not strive now, but lay quiet and expectant under my wildly beating heart.

My breasts for days had been big with milk, which, running out and trickling over my body, made me laugh to think of his greediness. For by all that waste of milk I knew he would be a boy and greedy, and I was glad

Again the sign.

My thoughts wandered happily to the night he was conceived. I remembered it was a warm, still evening in May, and the stars were very high and very small, and there was no moon. The air was full of the smell of Spring, the rich, cool, fresh Spring-earth and young foliage and flowers giving up their essence into the air. The birch trees and young oaks and hazels of the copse were full of birds, which woke and fluttered a bit and then slept again. We lay upon dog's mercury and last year's beech leaves just shed,

## AS IT WAS

I remembered the walk back by the river to Hammersmith, and my secret that I could not speak of. In my mind I went over all the months of pregnancy that were now at an end. I had had nothing to disturb the tranquillity of my soul—no bodily distress, no fear, no weariness—happy in a strange solitude that I could share with no one, and was content not to share. I was so glad of my strong, proud body. My pretty breasts and my slim hips I saw losing their shapeliness, but the emotion I felt was one of joy, not fear.

I knew I must keep my body strong and healthy, so that it should not fail my baby in any way. This was the final consummation of my bridal.

I remembered all the sweet times during those months—my walks with David—the sewing times in the evening when he had read to me. I remembered that moment when I had first felt my baby's life stirring within me. Like a bird caught in the hand, he fluttered in my womb, and my heart, filled with joy and wonder and love beating

## AS IT WAS

so near him, spoke to him secretly unutterable things. I remembered the times when I had arranged and refolded and busied myself needlessly with my baby's clothes. The cradle was ready, the basket, too, and the pile of white napkins. I wondered if I had everything he would need

The sign again

I woke David and told him. He kissed me sleepily, and drew me into the hollow of his arm, and we fell asleep till morning.

The morning came, a cold winter morning. I woke feeling as I used to when a child on my birthday morning, or on the morning when we were going away to the seaside. Something was going to happen that I had been counting up the days for. What was it? I had forgotten. But my baby had not slept: he was impatient to be out, and the sign was so sharp this time that it made me catch my breath. David was in his bath—I got hurried and flustered and called him to be quick and let me have mine, for the pain now was so sharp, and seemed so impatient that it excited and unnerved me.

## AS IT WAS

Everything before had been so slow, so calm; this was a new and unexpected note; I could not at once attune myself to it.

I bathed and dressed as quickly as I could, the pain speeding me with its insistence. My baby called me and I must hurry to him, but how? when? David, tying his tie at the mirror, saw my face reflected in it, and came and held me against him, and when I felt his body tremble my panic fled and I was calm again.

I ran downstairs to tell Mrs. Townsend, and met Ann, who disapproved of the bother of a confinement in the house; so all she said was, "Ye'll be worse afore ye be better." But I was not to be frightened out of my calm any more.

David had arranged that day—it was Sunday—to go for a long country walk with the Oxford friend I had met, and when he came I insisted that they should keep to their plan. So they went, sending a telegram to my nurse on the way. In a few hours she arrived, greatly to the surprise of David's youngest brother, John, to whom his mother



## AS IT WAS

refused to tell the reason of the capped and aproned stranger who took no notice of him

I remember standing at the door of our room and seeing it with a new vision—this attic reaching over the whole house, with a large old-fashioned fireplace with hobs at each side, on which a copper kettle always stood. It had a sloping roof, and a dormer window at each end. Half of it was David's study, and our sitting room, where his books, his fishing-rods, his clay pipes and walking-sticks were kept, and where he wrote and read, and I had spent such happy hours sewing and reading and dreaming. The other half was our bedroom, with the big bed, the bow-fronted chest of drawers, the low rocking-chair, and the large semi-circular dressing-table with a muslin petticoat round it. On the floor was an old faded carpet that had once been gay with bunches of impossible flowers. In the study part was a huge arm-chair that we had bought for the Esher rooms, a replica of one that David had at Oxford. On the mantelpiece were the

## AS IT WAS

brass candlesticks I had given him for his birthday, his tobacco jar, and a miniature of his mother as a young and beautiful girl. The pictures in the study were two old silhouettes of Welsh ancestors above the plain oak table, which served as a desk; a large photograph of the Venus Accroupie, which Richard Jefferies so much admired, an old, rather ribald ballad, with a coloured picture at the top, which we used to sing to a jolly tune; and a funny old painting on glass of Tintern Abbey. In the bedroom part was a large coloured reproduction of Botticelli's Primavera, and his round Virgin and Child, and a water-colour drawing of my father.

I had always loved this room, and on that day every detail of it imprinted itself on my mind for ever. I was content that it should be the birth-room of my first-born.

On an oak chest which David had made, near to the fireplace, stood the cradle. Round the huge fire on a fireguard I hung a complete set of baby clothes to air. If I had been laying an offering on the altar of my God,

## AS IT WAS

I could not have felt a deeper ecstasy than in that simple act. It was humbleness, pride, joy, wonder, tenderness and seriousness, combined into an overwhelming emotion, lifting my soul nearer truth than it had ever been before, or ever will be again. I cannot recall what I thought, but I believe in that moment I took on my motherhood

The pain came fiercer and more often now, but I was full of restless energy. I went up and down stairs, and went down to lunch, and read aloud to John, who begged me to finish the chapter in *Treasure Island* I had begun the day before. Mrs. Townsend brought tea up to our room, and we had a sort of picnic round the fire, she and nurse talking of practical matters, but I was lost to all but my own excitement, which not even the pain could subdue. I must be doing, my soul was singing and free, my body must respond however foolishly. The fierceness of the pain stopped me in all I began; I had to hold on to anything stable, and when I looked at Mrs. Townsend's face I saw pity there. But she could not speak of her feeling

## AS IT WAS

to me, and I was glad she could not.

I wanted to be alone with this fierce exultation of pain. My spirit sang in triumph after each paroxysm, but my body was like a dead weight on it. I only knew that my baby and I were struggling for him to be born. He could not go back to his quiet darkness. All was changed. He had begun his perilous journey to life—I must speed him and help him; keep him with all the strength of my body and all the strength of my desire for him, pressed forwards towards the light where his soul waited for him. I did not think this, but dimly perceived it was so.

I cling on to the bed, and feel that the pain is overwhelming me. I must not let it. Nurse comes to hold me. "No, don't touch me, go to the fire; I can smell the baby things scorching." So by trivial ways I try to keep in touch with reality. My few garments are unbearable. I try to undress, but become confused as the waves of pain break over me, making consciousness more and more difficult to retain. But I will not let my spirit

## AS IT WAS

be drowned. I will not lose touch with my baby. I have a feeling that if I let go my hold on consciousness I shall be leaving him alone.

Nurse says a word of praise and encouragement, which gives me confidence in myself again. I shiver as I lie on the bed, but I use every ounce of effort and strength when the paroxysm comes, and feel again the triumphant exultation. My body labours, but my spirit is free. My baby and I are struggling to be rid of each other. That strange, secret link must be broken. He must be himself apart from me, and I must give him to mankind.

My body is seized by a new strangely expelling pain. I am again terribly alone—a primitive creature, without thought, without desire, without anything but this instinct to rid my womb of what encumbers it. I hear voices far away. I feel hands about me, but I am not I; I am only an elemental instinctive force bringing forth after its kind.

A pain more rending than all bears me on

## AS IT WAS

its crest into utter darkness A cry, a strange unearthly cry strikes piteously at my heart, and pierces my darkness. My consciousness strives towards that cry, my soul recognizes it. It is my baby's cry, and it leads my spirit away from the dark back to the light.

Someone says "A fine boy," and I, wearily, "Is he all right?" They say "A perfect child" Then blessed rest and content—not unconsciousness, but just a sense of fulfilment, with no remembrance of pain, nor even of the baby, who is silent

They say "Here is your husband," and I hear them tell him I have been brave, and I hear his voice low and tender speaking to them or me—I do not know whom—I am too tired to listen, and when he bends over me to kiss me I cannot open my lips or my eyes for weariness. But I can smell the violets he puts on my pillow.

I don't know how long I lie like that, but after a while they give me my boy. I see he has David's fair hair and blue eyes, and I am glad; but his nose is small like mine; his ears are like his father's, and covered with

## AS IT WAS

soft, fine down. His tiny fingers clasp my finger. His eyes are wide open: what does he see as he moves his head from side to side? The light of the winter dawn fills the room; his eyes unblinkingly seek the window, not with wonder as one coming from darkness, but as if in this strangeness the light alone is not strange.

Suddenly the realization of life and of all that may separate us comes to me, and I hold him close. I want him still to be all my own. His eyes close, and he nuzzles against my breast, and with his groping mouth finds my nipple. He is soft and warm and sweet. As he draws the warm milk from me, and I feel that mysterious pleasure half spiritual, half physical, I realize that the link between us is imperishable. I am forever his mother and he my son.

*WORLD WITHOUT END*



E. T.

*“He has outsoured the shadow of our night”*

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## I

**T**wo days after our baby was born David had to return to Oxford for his last term. My memory of this period is not very vivid but on looking at letters that I wrote to David I see that they are full of unalloyed happiness. They are full of the baby's ways and development and of my joy in him; but fuller still of my passionate love for David and of the longing to be together continually when he should leave Oxford. Interwoven with this and occurring again and again in these letters is the longing for the country.

When I was strong enough I would often take the child in his pram to our beloved Wimbledon Common—a very long way to push a heavy infant—and if I could not get so far I had to be content with Clapham Common. In those days there were still

## WORLD WITHOUT END

large old-fashioned houses standing in acres of gardens—the country houses of bygone city merchants—falling into decay. These gardens were a source of great pleasure to me, and looking over the broken palings I sought eagerly for signs of spring flowers. I remember, on seeing the first snowdrops under the bushes of a wild over-grown garden, I held the baby up to see them, and picked sprays of young leaves and perhaps an isolated celandine for him to hold, so ardently did I feel the need for him to come into contact with the earth, and even in the hideous suburb in which he was born, to become aware of beauty.

But sometimes when the weather was good we would venture as far as Wimbledon. This meant a long and tiring hill walk; so I would take some food and sewing with me and make a day of it. I was not content until we had reached the remoter parts of the common, where no one ever came, where the grass was untrodden and from where the wilder and more timid birds had not been driven away. Here he—with his

## WORLD WITHOUT END

napkins unloosed—could lie on the grass and stretch his limbs in the sun. I could not read or sew for watching his eyes as they opened wide with wonder to see the chequered pattern of the sky through the leaves, and his hands held up to catch the far off fluttering things. I made him pick flowers before his baby fingers could do anything but feebly grasp, and in this way he picked a little bunch of flowers for his father: and finding a trail of bryony, I made him pick a leaf of what had been my bridal wreath. I talked to him, before words meant anything to him but the sound of a familiar voice, of flowers and birds and of spring; or sitting by his side while he cooed or slept I wrote my letter to David, sending the flowers we had picked. Sometimes I would take him to the pond and dabble his toes in the water, and this he liked so much that he cried when I took him out. But his griefs were easily soothed by my suckling or singing to him, and as he drew the milk from me while he spread his little fingers over my breast I experienced

## WORLD WITHOUT END

that wonderful pleasure half-physical, half-spiritual which makes it an ecstasy.

On these days when I could get so far I was especially happy, for I felt that I was giving him something that it was urgently important he should have, and his obvious pleasure in his surroundings—the moving trees, the bright flowers and the touch of the cool grass and the sweet untainted air—gave me a deep content. And these little excursions away from streets and houses, noise and ugliness renewed and refreshed me too. David especially welcomed the letters written under these conditions, for my happiness reacted on him, and the blessing of the place fell on us all.

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## II

DAVID'S letters to me during this period show how often a terrible cloud of melancholy brooded over his spirit, and how at these times he depended wholly on me and on my joy, to be a perpetual spring to stimulate and gladden him. When now I read his letters to me and mine to him side by side, I wonder that I could have kept that joyous happiness flowing from my heart; for over and over again his letters were full of the deepest dejection. But only very, very rarely did I let anything dam what for him was this necessary life-giving stream, and over and over again my heart must have been overwhelmed with delight because of the passionate words of love and gratitude which were my reward.

What a strange dissimilarity there was in

## WORLD WITHOUT END

our lives then ! David at Oxford, one of a set of brilliant young intellectuals, entertaining, debating, drinking, rowing for his college, working for his degree. All this was a new experience to him, though he never forsook his love of nature which took him long walks in the Oxford country, and in which he found the content and satisfaction that nothing else gave him, and I, an unsophisticated girl, knowing nothing of such a life except what David's letters told me, cut off from any social intercourse, living in that hateful suburb, but because of my lover and my child and all that life seemed to hold for me feeling the joy and ecstasy of life to the uttermost. Nothing clouded my happiness. I felt strong enough to overcome all difficulties, and with my eagle wings of love to bear my lover into my own heights

About this time David had a party in his rooms to celebrate the birth of his son. He bought a pewter drinking cup, and each member of the party engraved on it some motto appropriate to drinking and to life,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

and also his name. Some of the party wrote to me congratulating me, and the friend I had met before Philip's birth undertook the duties of a godfather, and presented the baby with a Bible inscribed with flippant verses. The occasion was unique, I suppose, and a good opportunity for the display of wit and philosophy, and I enjoyed reading about it in David's letters after the event. As was natural, his work suffered a good deal during this last term, and it was no surprise to David, though a bitter disappointment to his father, when he got only a second class degree. This, and the natural antagonism of their natures, made life at his home—when he returned from Oxford—no longer possible. Even I, to whom outside circumstances mattered so little, had begun to feel the strain of living in that uncongenial atmosphere. It was not long before an open break occurred between David and his father, and we looked about for somewhere else to live.

We were very poor. The £250 which we had been depending on was almost gone,



## WORLD WITHOUT END

and the essays David contributed to one or two literary weeklies had earned only about £80 during the year. But David with his tall graceful figure and handsome sensitive face, wearing the elegantly negligent and for him very becoming style of dress of the young æsthete of the day, did not at all look the part of the impecunious husband and father, and Mr. Townsend's puritanism rose almost in hatred against his son. David on his side did nothing to placate his father's anger and intolerance, and refused to consider going into the Civil Service, and only answered his father's bitter anger with sneers at those very qualities which Mr. Townsend most prided himself upon. With Mrs. Townsend it was different. She was no doubt troubled by this new phase in her son, and his circumstances must have been a continual source of anxiety to her, but she had always a far wider outlook on life than her husband, and a generous toleration and sympathy for the young, which now she extended during this difficult time to David. Indeed there was a spiritual understanding

## WORLD WITHOUT END

between these two which though never expressed, and by his mother hardly recognised, was never violated, but was sustained in growing intensity to the end of David's life.

As I could not go house-hunting it fell to David to find a new home for us. He found, in a new street in what was obviously doomed to become a slum, a half-house of which the rent was seven and sixpence a week, and to this we moved. It had a good sitting-room which, very much to the builder's surprise, we chose to have distempered a warm grey ; a bedroom which just held our bed, the child's cot and a chest of drawers ; and a little kitchen with steps leading from it to a tiny squalid back-yard, used by the downstairs people for keeping ramshackle rabbit hutches and hanging out washing which was always wet and never clean. There was a notice printed in the rent book which at first puzzled me—" Broken windows must be repaired by the tenant," but we had not been there a week before we understood the significance of this regulation.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

The downstairs people frightened me rather because of their way of moving out in the middle of the night. Very seldom did the downstairs tenants stay longer than a fortnight, because, as I heard later, they could not be sued for rent under a fortnight's tenancy. Sometimes they were quiet, but more often noisy, quarrelsome, rough men and women and pale dirty children, often with a poor frightened dog tied up to a barrel in the back yard. All were terribly poor and degraded.

Here we lived for a few months. During that time David was out a great deal looking for work, going from one editor's office to another, sending in his card; sometimes being received courteously and sometimes not; sometimes given a book to review or the half-promise to accept an article. He returned from these dreadful expeditions tired and depressed and angry, hating himself for his failure, hating the polite indifference of some of the people, hating more the sympathetic interest which others, who refused him work, put into their

## WORLD WITHOUT END

voices. But a few there were who were not indifferent to the reserved, shy, sensitive young man, who looked so proudly careless of their favour, and who refused to ingratiate himself, but whose heart was full of angry humiliation and despair. One stands out among the rest as coming out to meet David with friendly understanding from which the hint of patronage was entirely absent. He was the literary editor of a great daily newspaper whose literary page was written by men of distinction, and earned for its editor a great name in journalism. This man was attracted to David by the very qualities which others had found so disconcerting, and divined by his sympathetic understanding of David's austere sincerity the intellectual power in him. He became our friend and benefactor. The work which he gave David was the mainstay of our life for many years, and David made, on that page, a name for himself as a critic of belles lettres, and particularly of contemporary verse.

How anxiously I waited for David's

## WORLD WITHOUT END

homecoming on these days, and how with the first glance at his face I knew what the day had been. If it had been a bad one there was no need of words, and none were uttered. I could do nothing, for if I said one word which would betray that I knew what he had endured and was enduring, his anger and despair and weariness would break out in angry bitter words which would freeze my heart and afterwards freeze his for having uttered them. So as he ate the evening meal in silence, I talked quietly about the doings of the day, of the baby, of the walk we had been; and soon in our pretty room he would lie back in his big Oxford chair by the fire, smoking his pipe, while I sat on a stool near and sewed; and gradually the weariness would go out of his face, and the hard thin line of his mouth would relax to its lovely curve, and he would speak of an essay that had been suggested to him by something he had seen in London, or of a notable volume of poems that N. had promised he should review for the *Daily Chronicle*. Then I would slip

## WORLD WITHOUT END

from my stool to the floor between his knees, and he would put out his hand and rest it on my neck, and I would know that the cloud had passed.

But sometimes when his spirit had been more than usually affected by the too great strain that his circumstances put upon it, the cloud did not pass, and my chatter ran dry in the arid silence. After a ghastly hour or two with the supper still uneaten on the kitchen table he would say: "Go to bed, I'm not coming," and I would know that he would sit up all night, and in the morning would be deeper in despair than ever—or he would go out and walk till morning, and perhaps from the silence of night and from the natural sounds of early dawn, and from the peace of solitude and the beauty of intangible things he would find healing and calm. I did not sleep on these nights but took my baby into bed with me, and in suckling him and holding him close, hope and comfort came to me again.

Some days David would be at home all day writing and reading, happy and eager with

## WORLD WITHOUT END

the impulse for creative work which gave him greater satisfaction than anything else. If the weather was fine he would break off his work in the afternoon and putting Philip in his pram we would set out for Wimbledon or Richmond Park, somewhere where we could sit on grass and look at trees and clouds and hear birds. There the baby would play himself to sleep, while David read a book for review, or aloud to me, and we would return in the evening laden with flowers and branches of leaves or berries for our room. Some of the days at home were idle and hopeless—no commissioned work to do, and no impulse for original work—and on these days the squalid surroundings obtruded upon our spirits, and the harsh voices of the other tenants and the crying of children sounded inhuman like the sounds of hell. One of these days I remember very well. I had not got into the routine of housework and looking after the baby, and I asked David to peel the potatoes for the mid-day meal. This he angrily refused to do. But at dinner he praised my cooking, and I,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

still hurt by his unkindness, could not restrain a few tears at the welcome change of mood. Seeing my distress he jumped up from his chair, ran down the stairs into the street, and returned in two minutes with a bottle of cheap wine. Never was so homely a meal turned into such a joyous banquet. Even the baby sitting in his high chair joined in, for David dipping his finger in the wine let Philip suck it, and though he looked more surprised than pleased at the taste, he grinned at the joke when he saw us laughing.

Often we were quite reckless with money. Once when a cheque was bigger than we had expected we bought a beautiful and costly brass lamp made in the William Morris workshops. At other times we were so poor that when David was out for several successive days I lived on the remains of a Christmas pudding Mrs Townsend had given us. But I was strong and healthy, and both my baby whom I was nursing and I flourished.

It was a queer hand to mouth way of



## WORLD WITHOUT END

living, but when we had enough money we entertained our friends and had many evenings of lively talk with beer and pipes as the inevitable accompaniment. In this way I met some of the Oxford friends who had written to me, especially three or four whose friendship for David lasted all his life, and was extended to me after his death. These young men brought others with them, and I looked forward to these evenings when our room was full of eager talkers and lively wits who were all about our own age, and all enthusiastic adventurers into life.

When we had not enough money for anything else we lived on bread and cheese and tea. I remember having only ninepence one Saturday to buy provisions for the week-end. It is the only time in my life I have bought a pennyworth of butter.

Yet little by little David's work was increasing, and before we left London he had published his first volume of essays for which he got a small sum on account of royalties. This volume still sells a few copies a year.

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### III

THE squalid surroundings affected David much more than me, though I, who had spent my life in towns, had always dreamed of life in the country, and longed to be in the country in spring. My happiness depended much more on people than on circumstances, and when David was free from care, and he and Philip and I were together, I wanted nothing more. But now my longing for a country life was intensified by the feeling which David and I had that the child must grow up in the freedom and beauty of the English countryside, and we made up our minds to move as soon as we could find somewhere to go.

The irksome task of house hunting devolved upon David, and he and one of his brothers set off on bicycles into Kent.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

They spent several days away, but wrote that they could find nothing that we could afford in a neighbourhood that satisfied David. He returned tired and dispirited, so that I was surprised when he told me he had found a house that would do. It was in a lovely part of Kent and was called Rose Acre, and in spite of David's denial of any sort of beauty in the house I pictured a sort of replica of our honeymoon cottage. David kept saying as I grew excited in talking of it :

"I know you'll be disappointed, it's not a bit what you imagine it"

But I said :

"It's got such a lovely name, I know just what it is like."

So packing up our belongings, which were mostly books, we left London for ever.

I shall never forget my first sight of Rose Acre. I could not at first believe that this was indeed the house that I must exchange for my dream cottage. It was a square box built of bright red brick, with a slate roof and four uninteresting windows and a

## WORLD WITHOUT END

cheap stained-glass door in the middle. It stood nakedly on the top of a little hill in a railed-off piece of rough ground, untidy and bare and uncultivated. full of couch-grass and the ranker kinds of weeds. Inside there was a narrow passage with a room on each side papered with hideous red paper. Nothing could have been more unlike what I had imagined ; my spirits sank at sight of it, and I had difficulty in keeping tears out of my eyes. David, too, knowing what I was feeling was depressed and angry, angry with himself for having taken such an uncongenial house, and angry with me for having had such romantic ideas of it. He at once began putting up his book shelves and unpacking the books, and after I had lighted fires and put Philip to bed, and we had boiled the kettle, and discussed the planning of the rooms, my spirits rose.

The house faced south, and in front was a little copse of hazels on the other side of the lane. At the back the land sloped down to the village and the railway, and then rose again in the steep dark yew-clad sides of the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

North Downs whose ridge, west and east, ran as far as we could see. On the left of the house was a large cherry orchard, in which a little later on the cuckoos were to call to each other in different keys all day long, and the foam of the cherry blossom to be blown into drifts, and where later still, in spite of the boy with a rattle walking from dawn to sunset under the laden trees, the blackbirds would sing and scream and eat the forbidden fruit. But of all this I as yet knew nothing, and I could only try to bury my dream cottage away, and accept this so different reality.

David was busy in the room that was to be his study, and Philip was asleep in the new bare room upstairs, while I washed up the supper things and arranged the cups and plates on the dresser. The kitchen led out directly into the garden, and when I had done my work I stood in the doorway emptying my heart of disappointment and sadness. The dusk was falling, and the dew-wet earth and all the newly born green of spring filled the air with scent, and as I

## WORLD WITHOUT END

leaned against the door I took in a deep breath. The sweet freshness of it filled me with joy, and again and again I breathed deeply to experience an elation, as from a magic draught, that I had never felt before. I stooped down and took up a handful of earth and crumbling it let it fall through my fingers. Its harsh touch and its pungent clean smell thrilled me with a new awareness. My eyes were opened to the beauty of the night, to the dark ridge of the downs against the cloudless blue sky, where now stars appeared like pebbles dropped from above. Away to the east was a radiance where soon the moon would rise, and a soft wind as of ushering voices stirred on the hill side. A white owl flew past me silently like a ghost, and like the cry of a ghost sounded its quavering note from the elm tree at the end of the garden. The cherry trees thick with pendulous buds breathed—as it were—softly in sleep. The slender moon rising timidly above the trees laid her spell on the earth, and all was silence and darkness and sleep. On me too she laid her spell I

## WORLD WITHOUT END

turned to go to David, and met him coming towards me.

"There's a new moon," he said; "you must wish."

"There's nothing left to wish for," I said; "we are in the country and it is spring."

We were about a mile from the village of Bearden which lay at the foot of the North Downs. It is a most attractive little place built round a large green. The church with its strangely gargoyled tower is at one corner with the vicarage, and a beautiful manor house encloses the south side. At another corner is the pond where the cows, grazing on the green, drink or stand on hot summer days, ruminating and looking at the ducks who swim about among them. On the north side with their back gardens running down to the railway are the smithy and the wheelwright and the baker all occupying lovely old workshops and houses. There are two inns—"The Black Swan" and "The Lion." "The Black Swan" is the only new building near the green, and is ugly and incongruous among a

## WORLD WITHOUT END

thicket of yews and beeches where often I was to hear the nightingale sing. Near this inn was the station on the main road mounting up to join the important Maidstone and Ashford road. The road up our hill took us past the pond and the grounds of the manor house. "The Lion" inn at the other side of the green was an old half-timbered house with uneven roof ridge, and windows in unexpected places, and low, dim, panelled rooms inside, where beer was served in pewter pots, and where in winter the bar parlour, with its brick floor, and great oak settles each side of the fire-place, was bright and cosy with a huge fire of logs. Mr. Tompsett the innkeeper became a friend of ours. He was a splendid gardener as well as host, and helped us with advice and presents of cuttings for our garden.

We made the house as pretty as we could, though I never liked it. David's study, which was also the sitting-room, became homely and comfortable with the books and our more precious possessions, and for the kitchen I had an affection,



## WORLD WITHOUT END

chiefly because of the view of the downs and the yews which marked the Pilgrim's Way. I spent many hours at the table under the window ironing or sewing or cooking, and Philip sitting in his high chair near me would amuse himself by banging on its deal top with a wooden spoon, or turning over the pages of a linen scrap book I had made for him, and pointing with his fat finger at the picture for me to name, for he was very late in learning to talk, and his double Dutch became so expressive and I understood it so well that I began to be afraid he would never learn proper speech. He was at this time a splendidly healthy boy, with a mop of loose golden curls, and blue eyes, lively and intelligent and a great joy to us.

The friends who had so often spent evenings with us in our London slum soon found their way here, and the house was often full at the week-ends. David would go to the station to meet them, and I would stay behind to finish a batch of cakes. Philip and I would hear the train run in and in a few minutes we would see David and

## WORLD WITHOUT END

our friends coming up the lane that was a short cut to the station. Then I would whip off my apron and Philip's overall, take the cakes out of the oven, put on the kettle and spread the cloth on the kitchen table—for we had meals there—and be just in time to meet them at the gate. I looked forward to these times, and the extra work they made was richly rewarded by the talks and walks and the friendly way in which everyone accepted our simple way of living. I had felt very timid at first on meeting these clever young men, but after a while I got more confident, finding that when I was natural and myself I was able to contribute something to the general atmosphere which was welcome and expected. These were great days, and other days too there were when David was happy and eager and would take Philip on his shoulders, and I carrying the lunch, we would go to Thurnam Castle on top of the Downs, or to some lovely spot along the Pilgrim's Way. There we would spend the day, Philip playing in the grass and sleeping when he was tired ;

## WORLD WITHOUT END

David reading to me, or going off for a little walk by himself; while I sewed, returning with something for Philip—a rare orchid, or a large striped Roman snail shell, or a piece of strangely shaped flint. Then down again in the evening and back to Rose Acre which after such a day of sweet content would look welcoming and homely.

But many of the days were saddened for us by David's anxiety, and by that melancholy which had its roots in no material circumstances, but came to cloud his spirit and our life, unbidden and uncontrollable.

The work that we chiefly depended on came from the editor of the famous London daily of which I have spoken. The advent of books to review, or suggestions for articles for the paper were always heralded by a letter from our friend the editor. His neat clear handwriting became as familiar to me as David's, and it was these letters that we looked for each day. It had become my habit to take Philip for his morning walk down to the village, and call for the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

letters which we would thus get several hours earlier than if we had waited for delivery by the postman. So I became the daily bearer of good or bad news. Philip was now a sturdy boy of two and a half years; he loved this walk, for we generally timed ourselves when the school children were having their morning's interval of play on the green, and sometimes the children would beg that Philip might join them in "Poor Mary sits a-weeping" which he was eager to do. But on this morning of which I speak I was in no mood for games because David had been for days wrestling with his demon of melancholy, and as was his way when like this he had been going long walks, getting from the solitary places and the sky and the hills the spiritual comfort that he could get from no other source, but often wearing out his body with hunger and fatigue, so that he came home as on this morning haggard and weary and silent. I took my way to the village heavy at heart, and at the post office there were no letters. This

## WORLD WITHOUT END

filled me with dread and dismay. I had hoped that news of work would have helped him to emerge from this destroying gloom, and I well knew that my empty hands would deepen and prolong it. I remember toiling up the hill noticing nothing, not even that Philip had lagged behind to peep through cottage gates at the flowers and bee hives, and to look at little things in the hedges that interest children. I called him but he would not come. I called him again, but he was too much engrossed in watching a snail to take any notice of me, and I was in feverish haste to get my dreaded mission over. I ran to him and taking him angrily by the arm dragged him along roughly and unkindly, speaking in a voice he had never heard before. He screamed with fear and bewilderment, and I looking down and seeing his distorted face realised what I had done. I sat down on the hedge bank, and taking him in my arms mixed my tears with his and bending over him tried to sing his favourite goodnight songs to comfort him and stop

## WORLD WITHOUT END

his sobs. A little bunch of the flowers growing within reach and a feather found on the thorn soon comforted him, and he forgot as I shall never forget that dreadful morning.

I put Philip to bed before going to the study where I found David sitting as I had left him, not reading, not smoking with his head in his hands, staring with eyes that saw nothing

“There are no letters.”

“Why tell me what is written on your pale wretched face? I am cursed, and you are cursed because of me. I hate the tears I see you’ve been crying. Your sympathy and your love are both hateful to me. Hate me, but for God’s sake don’t stand there, pale and suffering. Leave me, I tell you; get out and leave me.”

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## IV

THE gentry of the village were nearly all people much older than ourselves, and openly, but in quite a friendly way, showed their curiosity about the young couple whose sitting room—they could see from the lane—was lined with books. They could not help noticing David as he went with his swinging stride along the lanes, and when we were out together and Philip was mounted on his father's shoulder they certainly were a striking couple. Soon the vicar and his wife called. They were charming people—he a scholarly old man who was writing a learned book on some aspect of Hebrew history; and delighted to find someone with whom he could talk of Oxford and books. A curious interest of his was ghosts. He told us of a ghostly

## WORLD WITHOUT END

horse and rider he had seen on the Pilgrim's Way, and of other curious experiences of his. Later on he got David a job in connection with the organ of the Psychical Research Society. I liked his wife, a childless woman who became very fond of Philip and me, and we spent many afternoons in the beautiful garden of the vicarage, and came home laden with fruit and flowers. The vicar on these afternoons would drive us back in the pony cart, and make this the excuse for having, before he went back, a little chat with David as he dug in the garden or smoked in the study.

The people with whom we became more intimate lived just across the lane in a big ugly house standing among trees. Their name was Crossman. Mr. Crossman was a retired wine merchant, and a man of wide culture, but whose particular passion was maps of which he had a magnificent collection. He was of the country squire type to look at, being red-faced and jolly and rather a heavy drinker of the choice wines for which his cellar was famous. He had a



## WORLD WITHOUT END

genuine love of good literature, and David and he had much in common. He was not a great walker, but he loved tracing on his maps the forgotten ways so many of which David had explored, and determining boundaries and estates; finding out from his maps the dates of new roads, and reinstating houses or buildings long since demolished. Hill sides now bare rose on his maps dark with their ancient timber, and streams long since degraded into sewers flowed clear and sweet through meadows, turning mill wheels by villages and widening into great lakes in stately parks. Great towns became for him again wayside hamlets, and where reeking chimneys and clattering machinery now stand he saw broad fields furrowed for the corn.

Mrs. Crossman was a gentle delicate woman with a keen Jane Austenish kind of humour. She was a wonderful gardener, and the ugly dinginess of their house was forgotten in the wide herbaceous border never bare of flowers, and the rock garden for which she had collected plants from all

## WORLD WITHOUT END

over the world. All the work of the border and rock garden she did herself, and it became the custom for me to go at least once a week and spend the day with her, taking Philip, and help her weed and tidy up her precious flowers. On those days David would come over to lunch, and Mrs. Crossman brought out of him that quiet dry wit which he did not often exhibit. He and this gentle shrewd woman got on very well. They played off their wit on each other until Mr. Crossman would interrupt and drag David off to the smoking room, to a glass of port and the maps.

So in a small way we lived quite a social life, and both of these elderly couples took us under their wings, and accepted us with our poverty and unconventionality in the friendliest manner. They became used to David's changes of mood, and desire for solitude, without any explanation. The old vicar was especially kind in unostentatiously putting little literary jobs in David's way.

But we were at this time still very poor, and the coming of a second child

## WORLD WITHOUT END

added a fresh anxiety. So David decided to go to London and staying with his mother try to get more regular work. The Crossmans promised that they would keep an eye on Philip and me.

I remember the day before David was to leave us was a perfect spring day. The cherry orchard was foaming with blossom, and all day long the cuckoos called there. But we were to go further afield, by ways which David had discovered, along forgotten lanes and green tracks. I carried the basket of food, and David carried Philip, who with his fist gripping a lock of his father's hair sat easily and securely on his shoulders. Sometimes he would walk if we each held a hand, and we would give him 'flying angels' over tall thistles and hummocks of grass, and his laugh was louder than the wood-pecker's. He was a most merry child, though still not able to talk in any but his own language.

When David and his son were happy together I was filled with that deep content which I think only women experience. It

## WORLD WITHOUT END

comes out of such little things. I have felt it surge into my heart when I have been sitting by the fire sewing, and David has been writing or reading near me. I have looked from my work to his beautiful face, the eyes with their heavy lids, the sensitive mouth, the noble shape of the head, and the fair loose falling hair, then at the large, powerful but tenderly expressive hand that held the pen or the pipe; and my heart has suddenly been flooded with deep joy, and wonderful content as if life had given all. Sometimes I would get up quietly, kiss the unoccupied hand, slip back to my chair, and go on with my sewing, knowing only by a movement of his finger that he had felt my kiss, but sometimes if he were reading in the big chair, he would draw me on to his knees, and I would lie in the crook of his arm, and he would read on, putting his hand inside my dress over my breast. Then did content become enriched with desire that had no urgency, but flowed like a sweet river watering my being.

So as we walked with the laughing child

## WORLD WITHOUT END

between us I felt that this day of all days epitomised for me the spring. Going through a little copse where primroses and dog's mercury and anemones patterned the earth, and filled the air with dewy scent, David, whose eyes missed nothing of all the life around us, bent down, and almost at our feet in the stump of a hazel tree was a nestful of blackbirds' eggs, the first that Philip had ever seen. And after that he found (though how I do not know—it was so much a part of the tree) a wren's nest, the first *I* had ever seen; and to this day I have never been able to find one without help, so wonderfully is the entrance made to look like the natural growth of lichen on the tree. The path through the wood led up to a rising meadow surrounded by a hedge of great may trees, with here and there a holly, and over all honeysuckle, bramble and traveller's joy. Then over a stile to find ourselves on the top of a hill with a wide view of Kent towards Canterbury. Under our feet were grass and daisies and cowslips.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

“ Oh, cowslips,” I said, “ Oh, David, cowslips ! ”

I had not seen cowslips since that day at Oxford three years ago. I knelt down, putting my face among their cool blossoms, and tasting and smelling the sweetness. All over the field the pale gold glimmered—tall, strong many-keyed cowslips I knew why David had brought us here Three years ago ! and now here was our child too among cowslips We made a ball for him of the fragrant flowers, and he trotted about in the grass, tumbling over and clutching at the tall stems to help himself up. After lunch when Philip slept under the hedge, David read to me the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, and one or two of the essays of a little volume he was preparing, and some of Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. Then we lay down with our eyes shut, near Philip, who soon woke up and climbing over us tried to open our eyes with his fat little finger. As we went home in the dark Philip saw the moon which was large and clear, and holding on to his father's hair with one hand, he

## WORLD WITHOUT END

pointed with the other to the moon and uttered his first sentence—"Ont it, ont it."

So for the first time in my life I saw and felt and knew the coming of spring. Every day some new flower was found of which I did not know the name, and which David had to tell me a dozen times before I was sure of it. I became familiar with trees, and began to recognise their bark and shape and slowly unfolding leaves, and each took its place in my heart for ever—the oak flinging its limbs about in the ecstasy of its strength; the tall guardian elms, so strong and tender; the witchy ash with beckoning claw-like twigs, who puts out her leaves so grudgingly and lets them fall so soon; the feminine beeches whose new born leaves are downy like a baby; the old mysterious yews, whose wood when it is cleft is red like blood, and which in the spring give up their pollen in clouds of golden incense. All these I became familiar with—and the hedges too with their hollies the hedger always spares, though he trims the elder and dogwood and flaming maple. I became aware in reality,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

as in imagination I had known, of the living earth out of which all comes, and to which all goes. My spirit was filled and satisfied as never before by a bare field of red earth, over which the teams of plough-horses toiled, or the glow of a corn field, or the smell of hay, or wet woodland, or by the beauty of a tree or by the variety of the tiny details of a hedge bank. I was aware of a deep joy and excitement as if I was a part of the stirring vital earth. Each season became dear to me, and their slow inevitable cycle—the fecundity of spring, the heavy fulfilment of summer, the grateful sacrifice of autumn, and the lovely secret withdrawing of winter. With what eager love we searched for the first violet and were waylaid by primroses! How our hearts stood still when the first cuckoo called, and the coming of the first swallow made the day holy!



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## V

THE next day David went to London, and Philip and I were left, for we did not know how long. But there was plenty to occupy me with the garden and the child, and the preparations for the new baby. I had need of all my courage and natural happiness, for David's letters were full of wretchedness and despair. Work was not to be had, at least nothing substantial, and his father raked up the old grievance about the Civil Service, pointing out that his first duty was to provide a proper income for his wife and child, and all the old sensible arguments. But I knew that that sort of security would be too dearly bought, and that David must work out his own salvation in his own way. And his way was my way. Life for him would always be painful, but at least he had

## WORLD WITHOUT END

the country which meant so much to him, and the freedom within the limits his poverty imposed—and with his simple tastes and needs this was not too obvious. The circumstances of his life were what he had chosen, and I would not encourage him to consider changing them. All I could do now was to try to convey my own faith in him and in his work, and my own freedom from sadness and anxiety

But in the evening when Philip was in bed and I was tired with my day's work and the burden of the coming baby, I found it hard not to let my thoughts dwell on our immediate cares—money and the birth of the child and David's self-distrust and cruel sneers at himself because of his failure. His reliance on me to encourage and cheer him was the stimulant for my pen, and so I wrote of the things that were permanent, not of those that would pass.

He had been away some weeks, when one evening sitting in such a mood a telegram was brought to me. I read "Commuision for book on Oxford £100. Returning to-

## WORLD WITHOUT END

morrow. David." I read it over and over again: a hundred pounds was a fortune for us. What a congenial subject too, what encouragement for him! How wonderfully, I thought, was my faith fulfilled! I was so excited that I felt I must tell someone. So without waiting to put on a hat I ran over to the Crossmans. Mrs. Crossman had gone to bed, and Mr. Crossman was alone in the dining room sipping the port of which he was too fond.

"What do you think," I said, having no time for greeting; "David is to write a book on Oxford, and get £100 for it"; and I tried to get round the table to where he sat to show him the telegram. But forgetting how big I was I found I could not squeeze between the wall and the huge table. This made us both laugh, and changed my almost tearful excitement and his tearful sympathy into a joke. For to him there must have seemed something pathetic in such excitement over £100. However, he made me drink a glass of port to celebrate the occasion, and called Mrs.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

Crossman who came down in her dressing gown to hear all about it by the drawing-room fire. I grew calmer, and remembering that I had left Philip all alone said good-night. Mr. Crossman saw me to my gate, and leaning over it as I turned to the house he said :

“ And I’ll tell David he’s got a good wench.” He always called me ‘ wench,’ and as it was his way of showing his fondness for me I liked it from him.

Shortly after this our baby was born, and was much to our joy a girl, and we called her Elizabeth after her grandmother, to whom the advent of a granddaughter was a particular joy. Her hair was dark and her skin dark with glowing red under the russet. She was like a gipsy. Mr. Crossman declared that David could not be her father, but that in the wood one day I’d met Pan, and Elizabeth was Pan’s child, ‘ a wicked wench you’ve got, David, a wicked wench of the woods, and the girl is her mother over again.’ And a child of the woods and fields she certainly grew up to

## WORLD WITHOUT END

be, though her hair soon changed from black to fair.

With the Oxford book David's luck took a turn, and I do not remember at this time another period of acute anxiety about money, and indeed we felt we might adventure a little, and when an old cottage in the village which we had looked at enviously many times became vacant we decided to move. Our baby was about a year old when we made this change.

During our married life we moved house many times, and always I had the feeling that somehow David would be better for the change. It marked a sort of beginning again. And so now with my hopeful and romantic nature I hoped, because at first we were so busy and so happy settling down in our new house—and this time one which we both loved—that the cloud that I dreaded so much would dissolve, and we should be free of it for ever. And always for a time it seemed as if it might be so. Then unannounced it would return. I should have to face it, and resolve once

## WORLD WITHOUT END

more not to let it affect me, and once more fail. I used to wish and pray to be different. If only I could be angry at his unkindness instead of hurt I thought it might be better for him. If only I could really take no notice, instead of pretending not to do so ! How I longed to be able to alter my nature. In these times I used to wish I was beautiful, or that he would find another woman who would keep him always happy. These doubts tormented my mind when I let them, but deep in my heart I knew that he depended on me, and would need me when his horrible suffering was over. No one could save him from his demon except himself.

The house stood facing the green. It was a tall, narrow, half-timbered cottage, with a square paned window on each side of the door, three above those, and a little dormer-window high up in the tiled roof. The front garden was long and narrow with a lime tree in the middle of each plot of grass each side of the path. A thick holly hedge surrounded the garden, which

## WORLD WITHOUT END

on one side was bent inwards by the constant pressure of wheels and timber and tools which the wheelwright in his workshop next door leant against it. The room on each side of the door was tiny but the beauty of the carving on the great oak beams that supported the floor of the room above compensated, we thought, for this. This upper room which ran the whole width of the house and was of beautiful proportions, with an old fashioned hobbed fire-place at one end, and three windows, was David's study, and in it our books and few possessions looked better than they had ever done. Its ceiling was low and beamed, and the light that came in through the lime branches was dim. It had great charm and individuality, and was a room for repose and meditation, the peace of which was not disturbed by the ceaseless chatter of birds in the thick ivy with which the house was covered, and whose tendrils of pallid green had pushed their way between the walls and the wood-work of the windows.

The tiny back garden ran down to the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

railway, and was quite neglected, but charming too, for I have never seen such profusion of white violets. They covered almost the whole space, and we had difficulty in finding where the paths had been under their matted growth.

The house was called Ivy Cottage, but it came to be known by the villagers and especially by the children as "the house with the baby in the garden," for Elizabeth used to spend all her time out there in the grass, and the children would gather round the gate to talk to her, and sometimes venture in to play with her toys. Philip was big enough now to wander on to the green or to the wheelwright's shop.

I loved the village life, and so did David. We used to go and gossip at the "Lion" inn, and the innkeeper became one of our friends. Our neighbour the wheelwright was an interesting old man, his family had been wheelwrights for generations, and the shop was one of the oldest buildings in the village. He knew the history of the neighbourhood and of the great families



## WORLD WITHOUT END

who owned it, and as he fitted a tyre or worked with his spokeshave he would tell us of local customs and the traditional tales of the place. He had a wonderful memory, and remembered details of gossip and scandal that had been current when he was a boy. But he was a kindly old man and there was no sting in his gossip, and he would scold us for encouraging him to talk instead of getting on with his work. He taught David—who had always loved good tools, and making things with wood—how to use an axe and different kinds of planes, and how to make the simpler sorts of things such as a new handle of ash for a spade. The talks always ended by David's suggesting to old Gray that they should go across to the Inn and have a drink, so off they'd go with Philip between them—Philip with his wheelbarrow which Gray had made for him, and in which he'd be sure to bring me back some apples or onions or a great cabbage.

Things went rather better for us during the short time we spent in this house. The

## WORLD WITHOUT END

village life was a source of constant interest to David, and work came in fairly steadily. The work on the Oxford book took David away a good deal, and kept him busy, and all this helped him to ward off the dreadful attacks of melancholy.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

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## WORLD WITHOUT END

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## VI

OUR life in this village was brought to a close by the illness of our baby girl. She developed pneumonia when she was eighteen months old. She was an adorably happy baby, plump and rosy and laughing, and when this illness came she was just learning to say a few words. It was March, and the ground was covered with snow. She lay for days burning with fever, quite unconscious, panting for breath. David and I took it in turns to watch by her, and hold the strangely unlikeliest child in our arms, trying with whispered baby tunes and words to pierce that dreadful unconsciousness. As I sat by the window looking over the snow covered green to the churchyard, an icy fear invaded my heart sometimes, but I shut it out as if it was the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

devil trying to tempt me to lose hope.

Mrs. Townsend came to help me nurse, and one day persuaded me to let her watch while I rested. In a little while she ran in to call me. I hurried to the room where the child lay dead—I thought. The scarlet flush had turned to paleness, the breathing was silent, the eyes closed. I stood shivering and dazed looking at her, but as I looked her eyes slowly opened. I had been told what to do if she got through the crisis, and now realising that it had happened I followed my instructions, and soon the child was sleeping peacefully. We picked some daffodils out of the garden to put by her bed, and when she woke we saw with joy that her gaze rested consciously on the bright colour. She recovered very quickly, but had forgotten all her baby words, nor could she walk, but had to learn the difficult lessons all over again. With the melting of the snow and the coming of the white violets she was soon running about under the budding limes, and once more gave her name to the garden.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

Then I got ill, and we discovered that the house was hopelessly insanitary. We decided sadly that we must leave, but where to go we had no idea, for there was not a house to be had in the village. Philip, however, solved the problem for us unwittingly. Running one day into the village shop he brought back with him the local paper. In it we saw an advertisement of a farm house to be let in the Weald of Kent near Sevenoaks. It sounded just what we should like. So it was arranged that I should go and see it. I saw it and fell in love with it, and in a week we left our beloved village with all its friends.

The new house was a large square farm house standing away from the road in the midst of its own fields. Oast houses, cow sheds, stables, hayricks and a huge barn were grouped about it on two sides. On the other side was a large garden and orchard, and in the front was a little garden opening into a field in which stood great oak trees, and in whose coppice-like hedges sang innumerable nightingales.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

The house had big rooms, and long flagged passages leading to dairies, store-rooms and an immense kitchen and scullery. In the scullery was a huge brick oven, and two large coppers, one for brewing beer, one for washing clothes. The outside door opened into a brick-paved shed where there was a pump and another big copper, and here all day the farm boys washed milk cans and churns, and here the milk-cooler was set up. Everything in this shed shone with brightness and here it was always cool.

The cows of which there were about fifty were turned out into the meadow in front of the house, and the children became quite used to these gentle creatures staring and sniffing at them, and soon learned to know them by name. Here on this farm we became familiar with the cycle of work on the land from early spring till Christmas. The bush harrow, plough, sickle and the team of horses became familiar objects to us all, and we saw and took part in many of the operations on the farm. We came to know the whole process of the cultivation



## WORLD WITHOUT END

of hops from the ploughing between the 'hills,' and the stringing and 'twiddling,' to the picking and drying, and the feasting on pay-day. The charcoal burner carried on his ancient trade at our very door. He lived in a tent in the farm yard near his cone, a solitary being, avoided by the village people who looked down on him and his traditional calling. Of course we tried to talk to him and find out about his work, but he was a taciturn fellow, and even over a mug of beer at the inn near by David could not get a word out of him. Once I remember when he was at the inn I saw what I thought were flames coming out of the cone, and thinking that his charcoal would be spoilt I ran as fast as I could to the inn to tell him of the disaster. He shook his head, but nevertheless came with me to reassure me that what I saw was not flame but luminous gas, and that all was well. After that he tried to ingratiate himself with the children, but they were frightened of his black face, and so he withdrew into himself again.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

This inn was called "The Shant," and was indeed nothing more than a sort of rough shed. It was kept by an old couple who lived in a neat little cottage adjoining the inn. Mrs. Turner worked for me, and it was she who taught me how to make and bake bread in the brick oven. How I loved this work—getting the oven white hot with burning faggots, and raking the hot ash in a circle, sweeping the floor clean with a wet besom, then with a long iron spade-shaped implement whose name I forget, putting the loaves in the clean hot bricks, and seeing them begin to rise before I had time to shut the iron door, and banking up the hot ashes against it to keep out the draught. All this had to be done very quickly, so that the oven should not get cool before every loaf was in. She taught me how to make the dough, set it, and shape it into loaves.

All this work I loved, as I did the house work, the gardening or any work which gave my strong body exercise, and which satisfied my spirit with its human necessity.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

David too was glad for me to do these things, and I tried my hand at brewing, wine-making, hop-picking and even reaping. Of course hay-making on the lovely slope of Blooming meadow was a festival for us all at the farm, and we learnt how the ricks that rose like a town in the rick yard were shaped so symmetrically, and thatched as carefully as a house. It is this full life of homely doings that I remember chiefly at the farm—the early morning expeditions with David to a large pond about three miles away to fish for perch and roach and even pike, the walks to Penshurst and Leigh and Ightham Moat; the picking and storing of apples; the making of quince jam, the finding of an owl's or a nightingale's nest; the wood-pecker which cut the air in scallops as it flew from oal to oak, the white owl which brought its young to the roof ridge to be fed; the beautiful plough-horses with their shining brass ornaments; the cows going into their stalls like people going into their pews in Church; the building and thatching of the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

ricks; the hedging and ditching; the wood cutting and faggot binding by men whose fathers had done the same work and whose fathers' fathers too; the work of the farm, leisured as the coming and going of the seasons; the lovely cycle of ploughing, sowing and reaping; the slow experienced labourers, whose knowledge had come to them as the acorns come to the oaks, whose skill had come as the swallows' skill, who are satisfied in their hard life as are the oaks and the swallows in theirs. How I loved it all, and with what joy and strength it filled my being, so that when I needed joy and strength they did not fail me. And often and often I did need them. There were many dark periods while we were here, many days of silence and wretchedness and separation, for sometimes in these moods David would stride away, perhaps for days, wrestling with the devil that tormented his spirit.

In an unconscious way as I grew older I came to realise that everything that is a part of life is inevitable to it, and must

## WORLD WITHOUT END

therefore be good. I could not be borne high upon the crest of ecstasy and joy unless I also knew the dreadful depths of the trough of the great waves of life. I could not be irradiated by such love without being swept by the shadow of despair. The rich teeming earth from which all beauty comes is fed with decay ; out of the sweat and labour of men grows the corn. We are born to die ; if death were not, life would not be either Pain and weakness and evil, as well as strength and passion and health, are part of the beautiful pattern of life, and as I grew up I learned that life is richer and fuller and finer the more you can understand not only in your brain and intellect but in your very being, that you must accept it all ; without bitterness the agony, without complacency the joy. Dimly I perceived that it was because I was I that life came to me like this. My strong instinctive body, my too sensitive awareness of David's suffering, my utter lack of resignation, my eager passionate exaction from life of all it had to give, the romantic

## WORLD WITHOUT END

ideals in which I so deeply believed, all those qualities which gave life for me its colour and intensity made me also vulnerable to its weapons.

David had a fair amount of work, but never enough to keep him from anxiety, and never enough to free him from the hateful hack-work books written to the order of publishers, which though he did them well did not at all satisfy his own creative impulse, the damming up of which contributed largely to his melancholy. Yet against this has to be put that he was untrammelled by routine. He loved the life he lived away from towns, his own master, though in a freedom that perhaps gave him too much opportunity for brooding and for introspective doubts and hatreds of himself. He went to London fairly often, and kept in touch with a large circle of friends, most of them writers and poets, but others whom he had known at Oxford in different professions. And these friends kept up the custom of our lively week-ends, and some became very intimate with the different

## WORLD WITHOUT END

phases of our domestic life, and helped both David and me over difficult periods.

At this time David worked at a tiny cottage about a mile away from the farm, which he rented for half-a-crown a week from a neighbouring farmer. We wore a foot-path to this cottage—first through a copse, then past a pond, and then over a fence into a rough meadow. It has now been obliterated, and no one would know that the cottage and the big farm house had ever had any connection with each other. There was always something to be seen on this path—a shrew mouse running up a corn stalk, a heron flying overhead, a hedgehog nosing about in the dead leaves, or a fox the same colour as the clay of the Weald trotting along the side of the copse.

Because of David's frequent absences I was very much alone here. Apart from the week-ends in the fine weather, I led a very unsocial life, and I missed the friends we had left at Bearden. For this village, which was itself ugly and repellent though in such beautiful country, did not yield a single

## WORLD WITHOUT END

congenial friend, and often weeks went by when I spoke to no one except the Turners at "The Shant" and my own household.

At these times my daily letters to David were my great delight, and all day I thought of what I should say and talk about in them. As the evening drew near I longed for the time to come when I could be alone and quiet to write all that my heart and mind were full of. My whole life was expressed in these letters. It was in a state of joyful excitement that I wrote page after page so quickly that only David, familiar with my awful writing, could have read them. To these letters I got long replies every day, for always, when he was away, to write and receive these letters was our great need. It was David's constant fear that some day I should be infected with his melancholy, and that my naturally happy nature would be changed. But something—a kind of certainty that, in spite of the turgid flood which often seemed to sweep away and destroy everything, there was something which it could



## WORLD WITHOUT END

not destroy, something which our love had created, and which like a rock supporting us would endure—kept my nature intense and sensitive, so that when happiness came there was not a moment whose preciousness I did not realise and appreciate, whose beauty and fullness even now I fail to remember in every detail. When it seemed that happiness had gone for ever it was into the treasury of memories that I dipped if David needed to be reassured that all was well with me.

David was so self-critical and uncompromising in his demand for sincerity and truth, and hatred of hypocrisy or flattery, that a little appreciation and success would have been a very valuable stimulant to him. It would not have spoilt him, but would have brought out the best in him, and have given him that faith in himself which would have been a strong weapon with which to fight that other side of his nature, which was so destructive. I used to wish that he had just the little money that would relieve him from the necessity of pot-boiling work, and

## WORLD WITHOUT END

give him more freedom to do his best work in his own time. But this he never had.

He had many friends who admired his work and loved him. He drew people to him by his exacting need of them. They had to come more than half-way to meet his reserved and shy nature, but their effort was well repaid, for with his personal charm, his talk, his dry humour, his clear intellect, his sincerity, his generous appreciation of his contemporaries, and his ungrudging efforts on their behalf, his never failing loyalty—and added to these qualities his striking appearance and a beautiful voice—it is not to be wondered at that he created in the hearts of the people with whom he came into contact a more than ordinary friendship. He made the same impression on many different kinds of people, and indeed I should think that there are few men who have been loved by his fellows with such rare and deep affection as was David throughout his life. My love for him never lost its passionate intensity. My letters to him were love-letters, and his home coming

## WORLD WITHOUT END

meant for me to be lifted into Heaven.

We cannot say why we love people. There is no reason for passionate love. But the quality in him that I most admired was his sincerity. There was never any pretence between us. All was open and true. Often he was bitter and cruel, but I could bear it because I knew all. There was nothing left for me to guess at, no lies, no falsity. All was known, all was suffered and endured; and afterwards there was no reserve in our joy. If we love deeply we must also suffer deeply; for the price for the capacity for ecstatic joy is anguish. And so it was with us to the end.

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## VII

**W**E lived at this farm for three years. Here Elizabeth had learned to walk, and Philip had grown from a baby to a little boy. Here things had gone fairly well with us materially, and here more than anywhere else I had become familiar with farm life. I no longer looked at it eagerly and curiously, but lived it, not unconsciously as the labourers did, but aware all the time of its richness and variety, its crudeness and its beauty, its hardness and its happiness, its cruelty and its innocence, so that when we heard we must leave the farm we could not at first believe that this life had come to an end. The farmer was retiring and had let the farm. As the new man wanted the house, we had to go.

Philip was now six years old and we felt we

## WORLD WITHOUT END

had better move to a place where there was a school. We remembered the co-educational school in Hampshire I had heard of years ago. So I went to see the school and the country, and, if I liked both, to make enquiries about a house.

I spent a day looking over the school and talking to the headmaster—or rather trying to, but he being very reserved and silent, and I very timid of this austere-looking man, we did not talk nearly as much as I had hoped. However, being prejudiced in favour of the school and liking all I saw, I stayed to see if I could find a house. The country all round was particularly beautiful, being hilly and wooded and untouched by the jerry-builder. I found a house that would suit us perfectly. David approved of the house, but the school he left to me. The country satisfied him completely. So we decided without hesitation to move there and send our children to the famous school.

The house was originally a small farmhouse. It was about a hundred years old

## WORLD WITHOUT END

and built of the warm grey local stone. It stood on a little rise of a winding lane which ran at the foot of the steep sides of a vast raised plateau. The irregular sloping edge was in some parts bare like the downs ; in other parts covered in a thick growth of trees—beech and yew for the most part—called hangers. Our cottage lay at the foot of one of the bare slopes—a steep hill dotted here and there with juniper bushes, but crowned at the top with a group of fir trees. To reach this hill side you crossed a rough field sometimes crimson with sanfoin, or orange with dandelions, or silver with dandelion clocks according to the time of the year. A large old-fashioned garden stretched in front of the house running parallel to the lane—and above it, for you entered the garden up half a dozen steps from the lane. Every sort of flower and bush flourished in this garden. Its ancient hedges harboured many kinds of birds, and the yew tree by the gate was the home of a gold-crested wren.

We were very isolated here, for though it

## WORLD WITHOUT END

was not much more than a mile from the village and the school, we were tucked away among trees and hills, and the winding lane which led to the outer world was the darkest lane I have ever known ; so deep and dark it was that the entrance to it on the main road looked like the entrance to a tunnel. On the other side of the house the land sloped down to a stream which flowed through a wild water meadow full of forget-me-nots, meadow-sweet, mare's tails and loose strife. At night all we could hear was the wind in the hanger, the barking of foxes who lived there, and the hooting of owls. It was a romantic and beautiful spot, and the house belonged to it and we loved it from the first. David of course began exploring the country round, and soon became familiar with the footpaths and byways. We found we were a few miles from Selbourne and the place where Cobbett was born, and within a day's walk of Winchester.

I was determined to get to know the school and the people connected with it, and this was my greatest interest to begin with.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

I was whole-heartedly enthusiastic about its ideals, for I was still a rather serious-minded girl, eager for my children's sake to know and understand the school and all it stood for. Its co-education was its chief attraction for me, but I liked too its love of the open air, its unscholastic freedom of discipline, its freedom from monied snobishness and its social life, simple and free and happy. I found the staff difficult to get to know. They seemed unfriendly and suspicious, but my admiration gave me courage to persevere, and little by little I thawed the ice of their cultured reserve. I attended parents' meetings and the Sunday service. As time went on the married staff called, and I became on neighbourly terms with them.

David with his quick eye for superficiality was never taken in by them as I was; though perhaps 'taken in' is too harsh an expression, for they were kind, serious, intellectual people believing in co-education, temperance, Votes for Women, and hygiene and liberalism. I liked them



## WORLD WITHOUT END

very much, and the social life they offered me was a new and delightful experience. I soon made friends among them, and became enrolled as one of the fraternity—though always with this modification: first that David did not share these interests and activities with me; secondly that we were poor. None of them were rich, but none were poor, and none gave the impression of ever having been less well off than they were. They all—so it seemed to me—had led and would always lead the same quiet comfortable lives, rational, well balanced. Their politics inclined to Socialism, and they were on more than usual friendly terms with the villagers, though owing to their temperance they could not hob-nob with them at the inn. They sided with the village against the gentry in discussions concerning rights of way, etc. They were moderate in all things; they read the best books and the *Manchester Guardian*, and loved the best music, and had replicas of the best pictures on their walls. Their houses were in faultless taste outside and in. Their simple oak furniture was

## WORLD WITHOUT END

made by skilled craftsmen, and their curtains were hand-woven. Their meals were lavish and good, inclining to brown bread and vegetarianism, and of course non-alcoholic. They were hospitable and kind, and yet later they all became for me 'stale and unprofitable.' They were so pleased with each other, so comfortable, so wrapped up in their theories and principles. They had no bigness, no unevenness, no spontaneity, no savour of the earth. Certain things were absolutely taboo among them such as corsets, face powder, beer, coarseness of any kind, free love and any kind of untidiness. Happy-go-lucky poverty and untimetabled lives such as ours they could neither understand nor tolerate. David frankly did not like them, and to them he was an enigma—a solitary, wandering creature who worked irregularly, who drank and smoked in village inns, who had no political beliefs or social theories, and who was not impressed by the school or its ideals—no, they could not like him or rope him in at all.

With me it was different. My admiration

## WORLD WITHOUT END

for them, my eagerness to learn from them, and my unreserved enthusiasm amused and a little flattered them, and finding me intelligent and talkative they admitted me into the circle. I spoke at Votes for Women meetings—though owing to a tendency for the speakers to assume an anti-man attitude I found myself standing up for woman's work in the home, and hating very much a lot of the clap-trap of feminism. My romanticism caught on to the idea that a happier and kinder world would ensue when women had more obvious power. I did not realise that politicians would be politicians whether male or female. I read papers at informal drawing-room meetings on various points in the education of children. The women at these meetings were all supported by their husbands, and it was thought strange and a little sad that my husband was not also voicing his belief in the efficacy of the Vote.

We spent three years in this house, during which time our material affairs gradually became better, though David's earnings

## WORLD WITHOUT END

were still in a large part dependent on commissioned books and hack work. He had produced two volumes of essays which had been received quite well, and he reviewed for a number of literary papers which also took an article now and then. In spite of the lifting of financial cares the attacks of gloom and wretchedness had become of late more frequent and more lasting, and there were terrible days when I did not know where he was ; or, if he was at home, days of silence and brooding despair. Often during this period while I was doing my housework or playing with the children or working in the garden I was straining to hear his coo-ee from the hillside, or his foot on the steps up to the gate. And often when he came I was terrified by the haggard greyness of his face, and the weary droop of his body, as he flung himself into his study chair, not speaking or looking at me. Once in one of these fits, after being needlessly angry with one of the children who cried and ran away from him, he rummaged in a drawer where he kept all sorts of things like fishing tackle

## WORLD WITHOUT END

and tools, and where I knew there was also a revolver. This he put into his pocket, and with dull eyes and ashen cheeks strode out of the house up the bare hill. I watched him go until he was lost among the trees at the top. I thought 'perhaps I shall never see him again,' but I knew he would not leave me like this ; it would not be like this that he would save himself. Nevertheless my limbs went weak and slack, my tongue was dry in my mouth, the questions and chatter of the children were an agony to me. I wanted to be alone and listen. But I could not. I took the children down to the stream in the hollow where they could paddle and sail their boats without wanting me to join in their play. There I sat with my hands in my lap unable to sew or read or think, and while the children played I listened. I prayed too that he might be released from his agony and I from mine. When the sun set and the children got tired of their game I took them home and put them to bed. I changed my dress, made up the study fire, drew the curtains, and got the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

tea things ready on a little table. I was in the kitchen, ironing, when he came in.

"Hello," I called, though the word came out like a croak. He was safe. When I could control my voice and face I went to the study. He was taking off his shoes by the fire, and I saw they were coated with mud and leaves. He did not look up.

"Shall I make the tea?" I said

"Please," he answered, and in his voice I was aware of all he had suffered and overcome, and all that he asked of me.

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## VIII

THERE were other periods of deep calm happiness. Sometimes we would work all day in the garden, David sowing or planting the vegetable plot, I weeding and rearranging the flower border. We would not talk much, but just throw a remark now and then from one to the other about our work, and compare what each had done.

"The broad beans are coming up well, and we'll have a good crop if old Ede is right about winter sowing keeping away the black fly."

"What about this lavender bush? Do you think it is too high?"

"No, you can't have too much lavender; and mind you dry the flowers this year."

"Look at that flycatcher. Can you hear him snap his beak as he catches a fly? His

## WORLD WITHOUT END

nest is in the jasmine."

I loved too the long winter evenings by the fire in the study. David would generally be reading lying back in his big chair with one hand holding his book and the other over the bowl of his pipe, and I would sit facing him in my favourite low nursery chair sewing or reading or knitting, and sometimes writing on a pad on my lap. David encouraged me to write. He said to me "Always write of things that you know. Don't write out of your head, but about something you have experienced, and if you write simply and truthfully it is bound to be interesting. If you write as you write your letters, it's sure to be all right, except for the spelling which I suppose you'll never learn." So I wrote stories for the children about things that had really happened, and an essay now and then, though I hadn't much impulse for writing except in letters. But best of all I loved the evenings when we talked. Then David explained to me the nature of poetry, or we discussed some book we were both reading. Sometimes he



## WORLD WITHOUT END

would ask me to look through and read the innumerable volumes of minor verse that he had to review, and weed them out for him, and I remember pouncing on *Poems of Childhood* by de la Mare amid a welter of worthless stuff. On these evenings I'd bring the supper on a tray, and with it on a stool between us we'd continue the talk as we ate the bread and cheese and drank the beer. Often we would talk until late; then before going to bed we would walk down to the stream or up on to the hill side, and David would tell me the names of the stars and try to impress upon me the shapes of the constellations. But I was no good at astronomy, and had no desire to call the stars by name as I had to name flowers. Nevertheless I loved these midnight lessons and from my lover and from the night learnt something which was nameless and unforgettable.

Often I would be busy about the house when David would come out of his study and call me,

“Jenny, where are you? I've got stuck

## WORLD WITHOUT END

with this damned review. Come on, and let's go to Selbourne. You've never been there. We needn't touch roads at all, you'll love it, and I know a woodpecker's nest."

"But, David, I'm all untidy, and in the middle of turning out the children's toy cupboard."

"Never mind, leave it. To-morrow I've got to finish this work, and we'll not have another chance for ages."

So I whip off my apron and put on thick shoes, and away we go all day long, tramping by footpaths through woods and fields, happy to be free of the house and the study and the children, running hand in hand down bare hill sides, or walking single file along the narrow paths the dog's mercury has left in the woods. Walking along hedges David would mark some particularly straight stem of holly or hazel which later he would cut for a stick, digging down to get a nice crook of root for the handle. He had a large and varied collection of such sticks, which it was his pride to season and

## WORLD WITHOUT END

polish and fit with ferrules. I had a black thorn with a knuckle-shaped knob which I always used. David hated any paraphernalia in walking, and we never carried rucksacks or mackintoshes. He had specially large pockets made in his coats, in which he carried a book to read or a notebook, and our lunch, and for the children we filled them with sweet chestnuts or hazel nuts, or any treasures we found. I hated walking over swampy places, and he taught me to walk slowly and evenly 'as if in a dream' so that I should not sink in. He taught me to walk with my body, not only with my legs, and though I never achieved his slow graceful stride, for my walk was with quick short steps, I could go mile after mile without fatigue.

These were my red-letter days when my spirit rose in thankfulness for the richness of life. Sometimes when he saw how happy I was he would say—

“Jenny, you ought to have a different sort of husband, one who would always be happy and careless and never cruel; who

## WORLD WITHOUT END

would always love your untidiness as I love it now, and not mind your short sight as I don't mind it now, and kiss you much oftener as I kiss you now."

"Well then," I would say, "perhaps if you were such a husband, I should be somebody different too, and perhaps not so happy as I certainly am now. So that's that."

The lark rising with quivering wings into the blue seemed to carry my heart with it, and my heart became the source of that cascade of song.

\* \* \* \*

We could now afford a servant and had a nice country girl who lived in with us, so that when David was away I was not alone in the solitary house. The children who were about seven and four, were strong and healthy, and Philip had just begun to go to school. I had quite successfully taught him to read and write, and on account of this I was asked to fill a temporary gap in the staff, which enabled us to help pay the heavy fees.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

Philip had inherited some of his father's moodiness which had become more apparent as he grew up. This quality in the child, and also the fact that he did not take to the things which had so filled his own boyhood, exasperated David, and I often found myself in the unenviable position of peace keeper between the two. Elizabeth, however, was very different. She was a regular woodland child. She wandered about the fields by herself, singing and picking flowers, or else played happily with her dolls in the outbuildings at the back of the house. With her sharp eyes and her passion for flowers she always found the first white violet, and her placid happy nature, unperturbed by her father's moods, made her a source of constant delight to him. The children loved their father, and admired him for his skill in making things for them and his knowledge of birds and flowers and the ways of wild creatures. Between both my children and me were profound love and sympathy. I had made up my mind before they were born that at least they should

## WORLD WITHOUT END

never feel lonely and humiliated as I had so often felt in my childhood, and that I would never tell them lies. So they trusted me, and I them. They were not spoilt, but lived simple free lives, being thrown a good deal on their own resources, having to invent their own interests and pleasures, for we had no money to buy them the toys and expensive destroyers of imagination which make children so discontented. We read a great deal to them, singing also played a part in our family life. David's voice was lovely for singing as well as in speaking, and we had a very large repertory of nursery and folk songs. The children especially enjoyed the hour before bed-time spent round the fire singing, each taking it in turn to choose the song. They were with us a great deal and when friends came to stay they would listen to the talk, or else play quietly without disturbing the grown-ups. David's word was law, but there were not many rules to break, and therefore few punishments. They had to help in the garden and do small jobs for me in the house, but it was all rather

## WORLD WITHOUT END

happy-go-lucky. We never ran our house to a time-table ; nothing was hard-and-fast. Sunday we always tried to keep for the children. On that day we put on our oldest clothes, and spent the entire day out of doors, taking with us bread and butter, cheese and apples. When the children got tired David carried them in turn on his shoulders. I loved those days. David was at his happiest and best, looking for nests, seeing who could find the greatest variety of flowers, trying to teach the children and me the songs of birds, exploring new paths and getting the children to understand the map of the district and the use of a compass. We scrambled through hedges, tramped over fields and meadows, sat on gates ; and the children and David climbed trees ; by the time we got home we were a most disreputable-looking crew, but happy and ravenously hungry.

Those were memorable intervals in far different periods, and as a friend of ours, a sort of nerve specialist, coming to stay with us about this time, strongly advised us that a complete change from ordinary life would do

## WORLD WITHOUT END

David good, he decided to go away. We had some friends who lived in a coast-guard cottage in Suffolk, and it was arranged that David should borrow the cottage until—at least—the book on Swinburne on which he was then working was finished. So he left home for an indefinite period.

My daily letters to him were now again my great delight, and eagerly when the last bedtime song had been sung, and the whole ritual of ‘good-night’ and ‘tucking up’ had been performed, I shut myself in the study and began to write. In the silence and solitude, in this room among the hills and woods, with nothing that jarred or disturbed, but only those lovely sounds that blend into the darkness and become the night—the stream running in the hollow, the murmuring in the trees as of a myriad ghosts wandering among their close-ranked stems, a flock of wild geese high overhead cutting the air with the ‘whiss’ of a scythe—in the silence and solitude, with pen in hand and a sheet of paper before me, it was as if I came into my natural element. I was alone with my lover, for



## WORLD WITHOUT END

whom my heart was stored with thoughts and emotions which now could become articulate. Nothing that I had done or seen or thought or experienced was left untold ; my pen flew over the pages in happy excitement. All the significance, the richness and beauty of my life were revealed as in a vision while I wrote.

David's letters to me were no less full, though only sometimes did his austerity give way to the passion to which I responded so eagerly. Greatly to my relief and joy he sounded much happier. The change from home was doing him good, and after a few weeks he spoke of returning, but I urged him to stay till the book was finished. His letters at this time spoke of a girl he had met. She was one of the family with whom I had lived at Margate, and was now about eighteen. He told me she was beautiful and timid and unsophisticated ; that she had walked with him on the beach, and had spoken of the books she was reading, of her love for the open air, the sea and the flat marshes of Suffolk. He said she was like a wild, timid

## WORLD WITHOUT END

sea bird, and that only very gradually he had overcome her shyness. He lent her books and introduced her to poetry. He told her of me whom she had known as Auntie Jenny, and of the children. He wanted to give her a volume of his own essays, but she would not accept it, saying that 'Aunt Jenny would not like it.' So I wrote to her and said I did not mind at all, and we renewed memories of years ago. Then I got a letter from her which showed me that she was unconsciously falling in love with David, and I felt very much troubled about her. To David she was a beautiful creature, more a dryad or sea nymph than a human girl, and he did not and could not understand that their friendship might cause her pain. She looked up to him as a master, a being of a different world from what she had ever known, one who could help her to understand poetry, and who could teach her all she longed to know about the life of the wild marshes where she loved to wander. His beautiful face, lovely voice and sympathetic interest had thrilled her; she

## WORLD WITHOUT END

innocently exclaimed in one of her letters to me 'how wonderful it must be to be his wife.' I wrote to David telling him to be very careful with this sensitive girl, as I felt it would be tragic for her first experience of love to be so unfulfilled; for it to be anything else would be more tragic still. I knew the nonconformist atmosphere in which she had been brought up, and the bonds of conventional religion and behaviour that united this family. She often asked David 'But would it be right?' I gathered that their walks together were secret, and that once she had cried in telling David she had lied to her mother.

David did not heed my advice, but was amused and pleased with my attitude to the affair. He wrote to me more light-heartedly than ever before, saying 'I love you for your serious advice, and the artful artlessness of all you say. There never was such an unwifely wife, and I wish you were here to be kissed!' However, it suddenly came to an end. Evelyn, burdened with emotions of which she was frightened, confided in her

## WORLD WITHOUT END

elder sister, who revealed all to the parents. David was interviewed by the angry father, who told him not to see her or write to her again, and the poor child was sent away.

The termination of the idyll in this rather ridiculous conventional way made David very angry; his anger, rather than depression, was, I felt, a good sign. Indeed when he returned he looked splendidly well and was in the best spirits. The children and I had been busy all day preparing for his coming, and we had a festive tea out in the garden. When we were alone I took him round the garden and showed him all I had done since he'd been gone—the peas all neatly stuck, the lettuces planted out, and the young cabbage plants put in for the winter. I tried to get him to talk of Evelyn, but he only laughed and said, "All the golden haired mermaids in the ocean aren't as good as one brown earth girl," and swinging me up in his arms ran with me into the house.

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## IX

AFTER the Swinburne book—which was a task not of love but of need—David was commissioned to write a life of Richard Jefferies. This was a book entirely after his own heart, for Jefferies had been one of the earliest and strongest influences in his life, and the years which he had spent in the Jefferies country in Wiltshire were the most treasured memories of his boyhood. There, wandering with an old countryman, he had very early imbibed his minute knowledge of wild life, and learnt to use and develop that power of observation which he had in such a remarkable degree. The downs country about Swindon he knew and loved as no other part of England. We decided to go there to refresh his memory, and to enable him to get some of the facts of Jefferies' life.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

The fortnight we spent in Wiltshire was one of the happiest times of my life, and one of the few holidays of any length which David and I had alone together. We walked all day long, and Liddington Castle—an old British camp above Swanton—Weyland Smith's Cave, and the White Horse of Effingham became as familiar to me as our bare hillside in Hampshire. We stayed at a farm house some miles from Swindon, but often, when we had wandered too far afield to return the same day, put up for the night at a wayside inn, where once we arrived so soaking wet that we had to go to bed while our clothes were dried.

During this holiday I realised how much the bare downs meant to me; they thrilled me with a patriotism deep and passionate. They had been the home of the earliest human beings of England, and with their relation to the sea they were mysterious and intimate, tender, wild, and sheltering. The west counties of England are her loveliest and most characteristic. Here is still almost untouched by time that rural England where

## WORLD WITHOUT END

Shakespeare's rustics and Chaucer's yeomen tilled the soil, and in Wiltshire with its stone built villages, its great barns like temples built to Demeter, its ancient and noble manor houses, with its guardian elms and rich red fallow, its meadows along the banks of Avon, its flocks and herds feeding as from time immemorial on the downs, its teams of farm horses often silhouetted on the sky line of the hills, its peasants toiling at their ancient craft in ancient traditional ways, I felt that I was at the very heart of England's being. My spirit was filled with content as my feet trod these ancient ways, and my heart with joy to know that this rich country belonged to me and I to it with all its history and tradition, bareness and richness, toil and harvest, simplicity and mystery.

It turned out that I was as good a walker as David, for I could go twenty or thirty miles a day without more fatigue than is pleasant to feel when home and rest are reached. But I could not match his stride which was a long slow swing from the hips,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

while I walked with short quick steps from the knee. I had, too, a bad habit of walking just a step ahead of David, of which he tried in vain to cure me. We fared as simply as possible getting two pennyworth of bread and cheese and a mug of beer at an inn. If we passed no inn we ate a handful of raisins which we carried, and for thirst sucked a pebble—poor comfort but effective. I learnt too, with David, to be content to walk without talking—hard at first, because with everything so new to me, and myself so excited by it all, I wanted to talk and ask questions. But I got used to long stretches of silence, and to waiting patiently for the opportunity to talk which came when we sat down to eat, or leaned over a gate to rest, or paddled our feet in a dew pond. We bathed too in the dew ponds, and I loved the feel of the water like silk against my skin, and the warm wind drying me. Then in the evening I made notes of anything that had particularly impressed me. Some of these notes David made use of, which encouraged me to keep my eyes open and my senses



## WORLD WITHOUT END

alert. In this way I learnt and saw much more than I should have done had I chattered all the time. Savernake Forest, Marlborough, Malmesbury, Shaftesbury, Amesbury, Devizes, Westbury and Bradford-on-Avon are some of the places I particularly remember we included in the wide area we traversed, and of course the special places connected with Jefferies. Many of the days stand out clear in my mind to-day—the ways we went, the things we saw, and even the words we spoke, so happy was I during this our longest holiday together.

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## X

I LEFT David in Wiltshire and returned home. There sorry news awaited me. The land on which our house stood, and the fields which surrounded it—even the water hollow and part of the hangar—had been sold to a man who intended to build a large house in the meadow adjoining the garden, and our cottage was to be the lodge to house the gardener. So we were given notice to go, and the problem of finding a new house had to be faced.

Among those whom I had met at the school was a young man who had been a pupil there. He was now settled in the neighbourhood, and occupied himself making furniture. He had means of his own, but being a disciple of Ruskin and Morris he determined to live a simple and useful life,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

making strong and beautiful things. At the time I met him he was building a workshop at the top of the wooded hill to the left of our cottage, and he intended later to build himself a house there.

This young man, though uncouth and brusque, attracted me by his sincerity, and I expect by his good looks too. He was magnificently built : tall and straight with a large well-shaped head covered with fair hair made fairer by constant exposure to the weather. His eyes were bright blue and very clear, his skin was tanned, and he had a reddish beard. He was like a Viking or a young demi-god.

His name was Sinclair. I introduced him to David, and they took to each other, though it is difficult to understand why, except that a certain uncompromising sincerity and hatred of affectation and humbug were common to both. I think the genuine simplicity of our life, enforced by our means, and its rather happy-go-lucky ways, contrasted for him favourably with the thought-out simplicity of the school people. What-

## WORLD WITHOUT END

ever it was, he became very friendly with us in his queer abrupt way. He was very clever with his hands. He could build a house, fashion a beam out of an oak tree, bake a loaf of bread or darn a stocking as well as it could be done, and he was very critical of similar work by other people. He had some hand-woven sheets which he wanted hemmed, and as he had not time to do it I offered rather timidly, knowing what a high standard he expected. I took great pains to get the stitches small and even, and when they were finished, after examining them most minutely he said "They'll do," which was the utmost praise he ever gave.

This incident paved the way for an offer he made to build us a house. He had bought a long strip of land at the edge of the plateau up to which we looked, and here, overlooking a deep and densely wooded coombe, our house was to be built. We could reach the site by a path winding up through the hanger by the stream which had its source half way up. This path was an ancient deeply worn track soft with the leaves that for countless years

## WORLD WITHOUT END

had fallen and rotted between its high banks. It wound steeply up in the angle of the coombe among the noble beeches and yews which were characteristic of our hangers. Arrived at the lane on the top you had a wider view of the South Downs from Chanctonbury on the east to Butser on the west. And here on the edge of this great plateau four hundred feet above the sea—which on a clear day you could see like a grey mist below the horizon—our house was built.

It rose slowly, for Sinclair himself built it to his own design. In his workshop great oaks—which he himself years ago had chosen as they grew—and which he had seasoned and sawn and planed—were transformed into beams, doors and window frames. Everything for the house that could be made locally was so made: the bricks, the tiles, even the glass were made under Sinclair's direction. The great nails that studded the doors, the hinges and the hasps, were forged by our landlord, and he taught us how to make the oaken pegs which

## WORLD WITHOUT END

held the tiles in their place. The children and I used to go up every day to see the gradual development of the house which was to be our home. We saw the great oak arches to support the roof shaped and hauled into their place, and the children walked on the rising walls which were to keep the fury of those hill-top storms from us.

The house when it was finished was long and low facing the south towards which most of the windows looked. The east end was taken up by the living room, which had windows on all sides but the north. The land sloped so steeply away from the house towards the south that from the windows there was no foreground for the eye to rest on—nothing until the downs seven miles away; and when the downs were hidden by the mists that sometimes filled the coombe we felt as if we were on a ship at sea.

Just before we moved I found to my great joy that this house would be the birthplace of my third child. The months before the baby's birth were the longest period of unbroken calm that I can remember. I was

## WORLD WITHOUT END

very well and happy with my new burden, and David was glad that the wish of the last seven years was being fulfilled. Both the children were going to school now, and this had made my longing all the greater.

David was busy on the Jefferies book for which he had collected all the data, and things were easier financially than they had ever been, or were ever again to be. I had a good maid, and was able to give a lot of time, with David, to the garden. It was heartbreaking work, and all the more so for the contrast with the rich, easily-worked soil of the garden we had left—for the soil was stiff and stony and full of the most pernicious weeds. However, by dint of hard work we were not long before we had planted fruit trees and prepared a vegetable plot. One of the most enjoyable tasks we set ourselves was the planting of a wild thicket which we hoped would tempt birds to nest in it. For this we collected seedlings and plants of all the wild trees and shrubs and creepers which had sown themselves in the rich leaf mould. Beech, maple, yew, birch,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

oak and ash trees in miniature we transplanted to our corner, and among the bramble and traveller's joy, ivy, to my great delight a root of white bryony, flourished, and soon draped the tiny trees with its vine shaped leaves. Every Sunday when we went for our picnics the children helped to find these seedlings in the woods and hedges.

My special bit of garden was the built-up terrace running along the whole length of the south wall below the lower windows. This was the only level part of the garden, and the border each side of the wide bricked path I soon had gay with flowers, and dropping over the edge great clusters of aubretia and white and yellow alyssum, and all the things that love a sun-baked aspect. Here Sinclair at my special request had built in the wall of the house an alcove with a seat, and here, when I was too big and heavy to be very active, I sat and sewed and looked over to the downs.

Below the terrace at the end of the garden David worked in a tiny study which Sinclair



## WORLD WITHOUT END

had built with a thatched roof, a big fire place and a long window. In the little border by the door he had planted all kinds of sweet and aromatic herbs—thyme, old man, tansy, rosemary, lavender—and from this garden in years to come I took cuttings of them to plant on his grave in France.

The main road to the town and the school ran down the hill on the other side of the deep coombe. You passed our house about a mile down the road, but on the other side of the coombe, and it was our custom to call to the children as they came from school when they reached this point. We could only see them in winter when the trees were bare, but when a sea of foliage tossed between us their coo-ee rang out clear, and our answering coo-ee cheered them on their uphill walk. If a bridge had spanned the coombe they could have been home in five minutes; as it was, it took them half an hour to reach the house which they knew to be so tantalisingly near.

We had plenty of room here for the entertainment of friends, and they liked this

## WORLD WITHOUT END

unique hill-top house. We had fields and woods all about us, and the lane which went past the house became a rough track whose old untrimmed hedges almost met above it. In the season we could pick as many mushrooms as we wanted, in half an hour. I've never seen bigger blackberries than grew in the hedges here, nor more plentiful wild strawberries than in the stiff clay of those southern slopes

Yet somehow we could not love the house. The heavy oak was raw and new, and seemed to resent its servitude in beam and door, and with loud cracks would try to wrench itself free. There was nothing in that exposed position to protect us from the wind, which roared and shrieked in the wide chimneys, nor have I ever heard such furious rain as dashed vindictively against our windows. The fire of logs burning in the hearth seemed not to respond so much to our fostering care as to the wind which drew it up in great leaping flames and sent sheaves of sparks into the roaring darkness. Often a thick mist enveloped us, and the house

## WORLD WITHOUT END

seemed to be standing on the edge of the world, with an infinity of white rolling vapour below us. There was no kindness or warmth or welcome about that house.

One felt it would have to win from the reluctant spirit of the place the right to become part of that land, as a house must do, and as this would assuredly do in years to come, for it was a house built for all time.

No solitude could dismay me now after the many nights I spent in that house alone, sitting in the great living-room by the open fire-place. We were not there long enough to conciliate the spirits which for ever moved and complained about the house. Human birth and sweat and tears of joy or grief had not had their way with that house. The stone threshold was still unworn. Doors had not opened to welcome a bride, nor shut on hushed and darkened rooms. The great oak planks of the floor were unmarked by human usage; no swallows had found the eaves nor lichen the roof. These changes would come, but not in our time.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

David was more affected by this atmosphere than I. I was aware of it, and later when I was anxious it oppressed my spirit heavily. But now other emotions overwhelmed it, and David escaped to his study which was cosy and homely and became his refuge.

Our third child was a girl—which was as David had hoped—and we called her Mary—which afterwards became Polly—after my mother. Though I had been so well and strong and happy all the months of my pregnancy, my confinement was long and difficult, and I was many weeks regaining my strength.

This anxiety coinciding with the finishing of the Jefferies book and a renewed period of financial worry had a disastrous effect upon David. He was away a great deal either in London, trying to get work, or in some far away solitude working at an uncongenial task and trying to exorcise that demon which imprisoned and tortured his spirit.

While we were here his father got him recommended for a government post as

## WORLD WITHOUT END

assistant secretary to a commission sitting to consider the preservation of ancient Welsh monuments. This job brought in for the first time in our lives a regular and adequate income, and for a while it seemed as if material anxiety was a thing of the past. But this security with its attendant regular hours of work for David, and the necessity of his being so much in London, was foreign to our ways, and could not last. David, too, felt that his father's influence had unfairly secured him this post, and also that the work itself was not worth the money he was getting for it. These circumstances fretted him. It was not life as he understood it, and I utterly sympathised with him. So, enduring another outbreak of anger from his father, he resigned after three months. The argument 'It is your first duty to provide for your wife and children' had not that portentous significance for us which it had for Mr. Townsend, and the return to our happy-go-lucky ways was without regrets to either of us.

While we were in this house something

## WORLD WITHOUT END

happened which more than ever increased our growing dislike of it. Our baby girl who was a remarkably healthy strong child fell suddenly dangerously ill of a mysterious disorder.

I had taken her out one morning in her pram to see a meet of the hounds at an inn half a mile away. It was a lovely clear fresh morning. Her rosy cheeks bulged out from her woollen bonnet, and her brown eyes shone with excitement at the sight of the hounds and horses and people. She moved her hands in that expressive way that children have before they can talk, and jumped up and down in her pram and leaned over to touch the hounds. Then suddenly she fell back as if unconscious, while a strange and dreadful pallor took the place of her vivid colour. I was terrified, and ran home as fast as I could, stopping now and then to tuck her in more closely, thinking she might have got cold. Then just as suddenly she sat up her colour and her normal look returning, and her spirits as gay as before, I thought that what I had seen was

## WORLD WITHOUT END

a bad dream, or that my eyes had played me a ghastly trick, but I nevertheless hurried home. For hours she played happily in the big living-room, when suddenly she was overcome again by unconsciousness and that awful pallor. The maid rushed down to the study for David, while I held the child in my arms thinking she was dead or dying. David thought so too, but while we were looking at her in dazed horror, she came to, laughing and jolly as before. We sent for the doctor, who on examination said a serious operation must be performed at once, and he would there and then take us to the hospital in his car.

The evening had turned wet and stormy, and hardly knowing what I did I wrapped the child up, and—forgetting to put on either hat or coat—got into the car with David. We sat together, with the merry child on David's lap. We could not speak, but only looked in dumb agony into each other's face. The rain beat against us as the car raced down the steep hill, and the children who could see the road through

## WORLD WITHOUT ENL

bare trees shouted coo-ee to us across the coombe as we passed the house. David put a rug round me and the child. He was used to the rain, and did not feel it. At the hospital in the matron's room where a big fire was burning Polly ran about as gay and frisky as a kitten, but when after some time a nurse came to take her away her look of terror and her agonised cry of 'Mummy' broke down my courage.

The doctor understanding all, advised David to take me away from the hospital for two hours. We had nowhere to go, even if we had wanted to see anyone, and in the darkness, with nothing but the rug slung round us and pressed close to each other, we walked for two hours over the heath which lay just outside the town. At the end of that time we went back to the hospital not daring to think what we should hear. All was over, but the child was still under the anæsthetic. The operation had not been as severe as they had feared, and there was every hope of a complete recovery. David suggested that, as the child had never been in the care of



## WORLD WITHOUT END

anyone but myself, it might hasten her recovery if I stayed with her and assisted the nurse as well as I could. The doctor and matron readily agreed to this, and David returned home to get my things.

I stayed here three weeks, never leaving the building, for the baby was liable to sudden spasms of pain when only I could soothe her and keep her from crying; also she would take from no one else the uninteresting diet which was necessary for her. It was a strange experience living among ill people in such unhomely surroundings. When my baby did not need me I used to help the nurses, particularly with the little children, and was in great demand for my songs. David came every day to see us and bring us a drawing or story or painted picture from the two children at home. All was going well with them, but David looked ill and haggard. If the baby was asleep when he came the matron would let us have her cosy little room all to ourselves, and David would read to me something he had just written or we'd talk of homely things.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

If talk failed he would take me on his knee and I would lie in his arms whose touch round me eased me of all weariness and care.

"Jenny, how could you ever suggest I could do without you? I want you, Jenny, and no one but you. Its only when I'm unhappy that you think such a thing, isn't it? Don't ever think that again, will you? Open your eyes and promise."

"Well, you must promise never to be unhappy again."

"Oh, if only I could, God knows I would."

The baby recovered rapidly as children do, and we were able to leave the hospital and return home. A great welcome awaited us. The children had got presents for Polly: the house was full of wild flowers they had gathered, and looked for once warm and homely. We had a great sing-song in the evening, and the children were brimful of school and home news, and eager to know all about our life in the hospital. It was lovely to slip back into the old ways and duties; the children seemed especially lively and

## WORLD WITHOUT END

happy after the poor sickly ones I'd been among so long. The baby snuggled down in her cot with a contented sigh, and all was well as before.

But things began to go badly for us. There was no commissioned work to do now that the Jefferies book was finished, and worst of all the paper of which our friend was the literary editor, and on which we had so depended, changed hands. The new editor was friendly towards David, but naturally he had his own circle of friends to whom he gave work, and little was left for the old contributors. Also the whole character of the paper altered. The literary page, which under its distinguished editor had maintained such a high level of criticism, and won for itself an unchallenged prestige, now under the new management lowered its standards all round, and became a column or two of criticism divided into titled paragraphs out of which everything had been cut that was not strictly popular.

This was a very serious blow to our finances, and though David immediately

## WORLD WITHOUT END

went to London to try to fill up this gap and was partially successful, he gained no work on which we could so depend. I don't know what we should have done if something had not turned up—as it so often did when we seemed to have come to the end of our resources.

The school people asked me if I would take in one or two children, who were for various reasons unable to go home for the holidays. This I was very glad to do, and as I often had two or three children at a time for whose care the parents paid me very well, a very substantial sum was added to our dwindling income.

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## XI

ALL this anxiety, following the trying time during the baby's illness, and added to the irritation caused by work on a most uncongenial, poorly paid book which David dare not refuse to do, reacted badly on his nervous health. We decided it was best that he should again leave home, and with the help of a friend lodgings were found in a farm house in a little village not far from Trowbridge in Wiltshire. Here for some weeks David worked hard at the book, and when it was nearly finished I went to spend a few days with him. I shall never forget the kindness of those people—the farmer and his two spinster sisters who lodged us in their house and treated us as though we were honoured guests. The farm house was tall, and on the top floor

## WORLD WITHOUT END

David had two large rooms with sloping ceilings and wide windows. It was spring, and in both rooms great log fires burned. On the table laid in front of the sitting room fire was spread a feast of every delicacy these hospitable people could provide us with. A pint jug full of cream and a quart jug full of home brewed cider were two of the items. Everything came from the farm. I have never tasted such butter and cheese and cream as were made in the huge dairy which the sisters managed, or seen such quantities of food set before two people. It was easy to see how fond they had become of David, who looked ever so much better for the change. They treated us like children, and would not believe that we had three children. They loved us to go in the dairy and to dip out little cups of cream to drink, or to draw ourselves a mug of cider from the cask which stood in the corner, or to come into the kitchen when they were baking cakes and beg one hot from the oven. They could not give us enough or do enough for us. They brought us up tea in the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

morning with a bunch of fresh wild flowers on the tray, and lit our bedroom fire as well as the sitting-room fire before we got up. They treated us as if we were a honeymoon couple, and made us feel that it was not at all inappropriate.

Near the farmhouse ran a stream in which David bathed. The brother—who made as much of us as the sisters—got his men to clear away some boulders to make the pool more convenient. Down to this pool we both went each morning. I remember so well the path through the wood which at this time of the year led through a haze of bluebells to the river. I remember as we walked side by side I did indeed feel like a young bride, and David said, as he put his arm round my waist and I mine round his, “I don’t believe, Jenny, you’ll ever grow up, or ever be too old to be made love to.”

“When I am, will you love me as you do now?”

“That’s a question I won’t answer before breakfast,” he said teasingly, as catching

## WORLD WITHOUT END

sight of the river through the trees he began to take off his clothes and ran to the bank.

We walked all one day, and in the evening came to the beautiful old manor house where our friends lived—or rather David's friends, for I had not met them before. Our hostess when we arrived was gardening, dressed in an oriental costume of diaphanous material, which she declared was much the most convenient dress for the purpose when her husband insincerely chid her for her trousers. They were rich and young and intellectual, and I hated the atmosphere they created in that dignified house. I hated the cold luxury, the polished insincerity, the clever bloodless wit, and the exotic vegetarian food. Their poor wan baby whose nursery was like a princess's out of the Arabian Nights filled me with pity and horror. I felt very conscious when with people of that kind that I fell very far below what they had expected of David's wife. Neither beautiful nor brilliant nor original, I was utterly out of my element with those to



## WORLD WITHOUT END

whom these qualities were paramount. David was annoyed with me for feeling like that, for though he saw through their affectations, even openly laughing at them, there was much in them that interested and amused him, and he accepted them as I could not.

I was glad to be out in the open air with my blackthorn, walking by David's side, back to our farmhouse by way of Bradford-on-Avon.

On my last evening at the farm the sisters asked us if we would spend an hour with them in their sitting-room. So I put on a pretty red dress that I had brought, and after our supper upstairs we came down to the best sitting-room and were received by the two old ladies in state. They both wore black silk dresses with beautiful old lace collars and heavy gold watch chains looped in front of their tightly fitting bodices. The room smelt of roses, from a great bowl of dried leaves which stood on a little table, and on another table were wine glasses, two bottles of home-made wine, and a plate of

## WORLD WITHOUT END

cakes. A tall old-fashioned piano stood against the wall, with a green silk front behind a fretwork pattern, on which the ladies begged me to play. I was no pianist and felt very shy of being expected to entertain our friends in such a way, but I could not refuse to do something for them in return for all they had done for us. So in order to help out my playing I suggested that I should sing as well, which delighted them. I played and sang as many folk-songs as I could remember. When my repertoire was exhausted David was emboldened by my plight to come to my rescue with some Welsh songs. He loved his native songs, and the soft liquid Welsh tongue suited his voice. After we had sung all we knew, our hostesses and host, who had shown their appreciation by their rapt attention, begged us just to play 'God save the King,' which we did while all stood up solemnly. Then we had to eat and drink as much as we could, before we were at last thanked by each of them in turn, and told that it had been an evening they would

## WORLD WITHOUT END

always treasure as a happy memory.

David I could see was pleased with the way I had overcome my shyness and done my best for these kind people, and when we were upstairs he said to me as we stood by the open window sniffing the sweet dew-laden air, listening to the river, and he began taking down my hair—

“I did love you, Jenny, when you began so tremblingly to sing. I felt proud of you too: your red dress suited you so well. I know I’ll never hear the last of you from the old ladies. You’ve quite cut me out.”

I shook my head so vigorously that the last hairpin fell on to the floor.

“How pretty your hair is too.” He took my face between his hands. “When next I’m unkind to you, Jenny, remember that what I say then is not true. It’s a kind of dreadful play-acting that comes over me. What is true is what I say now—that I love you.”

In the morning, laden with a basketful of country fare from the farm, the brother drove me in his gig to Salisbury where it was

## WORLD WITHOUT END

market day, and from where I was to take the train home. He had two calves in the back, so that there was no room for David. He and the two old ladies waved good-bye to me from the gate and I to them until the windings of the lane hid us from each other. As I looked back I could see the roof of the tall farm house, over the hedges and the window at which David and I had stood the evening before. When I think of that time I am still standing there listening to the river and sniffing the scent of bluebells, and my heart is beating with my lover's touch as he unloosens my hair.

Only a few weeks later David had to leave the farm suddenly. The brother had been taken very seriously ill, and died after an operation, and the sisters gave up the farm.

David returned home with his book unfinished and in a state of depression brought on by the tragic circumstances at the farm. The book had been an uncongenial task from the first, but after this interruption it seemed impossible for him to

## WORLD WITHOUT END

concentrate on it. Added to this was the difficulty of getting regular work, for though odd jobs—some pleasant and some mere tasks—were fairly frequent, it was a regular flow of money, however small, that we most needed, and which would more than anything relieve the unceasing pressure of anxiety. We decided we must reduce our expenses, which could only be done by living in a smaller house or doing without a servant.

Some workmen's cottages were being built down in the village quite near the school. The builder was a wealthy socialist and aristocrat. He had bought an ancient half-timbered cottage which had lately been condemned and its garden. On the site three couples of semi-detached cottages were to be erected. It was typical of the society which I have described that the cottages were cheaply built and planned, and that, though these people were meticulously hygienic in theory, no bathroom was provided for their tenants. The rents charged were more than the villagers were accustomed

## WORLD WITHOUT END

to pay, and on that account the houses were mostly occupied by poor gentlefolk like ourselves, or the villagers eked out the rent by surreptitiously taking in a lodger. The scheme in fact differed in no respect from an ordinary commercial investment, and yielded a higher percentage of interest than was compatible with either the socialism or the philanthropy which the owners professed.

There was no difficulty in arranging with our generous landlord to leave the house. The large oak refectory table and settle he had made for our living-room were too big for the cottage; so we left them there. The books in the house we moved down to the study which David was to retain for a nominal rent of a shilling a week, and our landlord said it was to be David's for as long as he wanted it. This was an act of consideration and friendship that was deeply appreciated by us, for the room had become very congenial to David. In it he sought the solitude which was so necessary for his spirit's health, and it had become his refuge where he could best overcome his demon.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

Besides, the cottage was tiny and cramped, with no place where he could work, and it was, moreover, in the middle of the village.

We did not know when we moved into that cottage that it was to be our last home together. The same hope haunted me as it had always done—that now perhaps David would be happier. If ever the old dark yew in the garden that gave its name to the cottage seemed to me symbolic of the dark mystery of life which no ray could reveal, it was not then as I stepped across the threshold. The tiny compactness of the house delighted me, and David enjoyed as I did setting the place to rights, and finding homes for all our things. The living room and kitchen were one, and the children and David gave me a gay cottage tea-set to hang on the dresser. The cottage lent itself to gaiety in a way that our hill top house had not done. The window sills were wide, and I had a row of scarlet geraniums in pots on them. The curtains were dotted with bunches of blue and red flowers, and to cover the deal table I bought one of those old-

## WORLD WITHOUT END

fashioned kitchen table clothes of bright checks.

On three sides of the house was the garden in which the soil was rich, having been cultivated for hundreds of years. Between it and the garden of the big house next door was a hedge of tall wild damson trees, and here one year to our infinite delight a nightingale sang. We soon had the garden in order—vegetables mostly with a border of flowers. By the only door into the house we planted the herbs which David so loved. Rosemary, thyme, lavender, bergamot and old man were there, all direct descendants of our first country garden, which we had propagated from cuttings each time we moved. We planted wild climbing plants in the hedge to drape the rather scraggy damson trees. Bryony, traveller's joy and honeysuckle were all successfully transplanted from the lanes, and over the new red brick walls we trained fruit trees. Over the door David built a simple porch with a seat each side which was soon covered with jasmine. Everything grew very easily in



## WORLD WITHOUT END

that kindly soil, and gardening once more became a pleasure.

David went everyday to the study, coming down for dinner at noon. He walked or gardened till tea time, and went to the study again till supper at about half past eight. The children were very near school now, and I was only a mile from the town instead of three miles and a half.

Here I came into close contact with the people of the school, and here among them I became aware of their limitations which hitherto my uncritical admiration had not allowed for. I became aware that their conventions were as rigid and intolerant as other people's, and that their calling themselves unconventional was indicative of their whole relation to life. They lived in an unreal world where everyone wore labels—and the label was the man—Socialist, Vegetarian, Humanitarian, or whatever it might be. There was among them a show of robustness and open air jollity, of freedom from the fetters of money and snobbishness, of sensitiveness to the less obvious things of

## WORLD WITHOUT END

life ; but all these things had no depth at all, and when confronted with a severe test vanished like the writing on those magic note tablets when you draw the talc slide over them.

Among the villagers, one of whom was my next door neighbour, I found real people—people whom life had buffeted, to whom it had imparted humour and shrewdness and wide tolerance ; people who though poor were incredibly generous when need arose, and incredibly petty sometimes in their social dealings ; whose lives were so unordered that there always seemed time in their overworked days, and space in their overfilled houses, for troubles not their own ; people who had very little idea of thrift, but who worked cheerfully from morning till night for a wretched wage ; women whose one recreation was half an hour's gossip with a neighbour, and men who enjoyed their beer and their wives.

I liked them as they stood in their Sunday black in a ring on the village green watching the gentry who were dancing folk dances in

## WORLD WITHOUT END

print dresses and sunbonnets. "Well," said my neighbour with a shrewd smile, "I suppose they've got to be up to something." Many of their habits I didn't like, but in contrast to the school people their genuineness and earthiness shone out as cardinal virtues. They were too busy with their work and keeping their homes going to have formulated theories and principles. They summed up their experience of life in pithy sayings, as for example did a woman whom I particularly liked when her daughter was leaving 'good service' to be married—"I telled her," she said, 'she'd never know the size of her belly till her feet were under her own table.

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## XII

THE chequered pattern of our life was still being woven out of the varied elements of David's and my temperament and our circumstances. There were days of calm happy ordinariness, and days when on the spur of the moment we would take our sticks and walk along the South Downs to Cocking, or going by train to the nearest point tread once again our beloved Pilgrims' Way. Other days would come in which the preceding happiness was thrown into brilliant contrast by the darkness and despair of what followed. An incident in such a period is still vivid in my memory because of a woman who shared in it, and who became my dearest friend.

David had been away for two weeks. I was looking forward to his return, and to the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

beginning again for me of the routine which made my life and myself, as it were, whole again. He was coming back from a big house party of men of his own age and interests who met together each year to talk and walk. They met in an old Manor House owned by the host of the party, whom we had visited in Wiltshire, and here with every kind of comfort and luxury, among congenial friends who admired and loved him in a way very few men are admired and loved by their contemporaries, David had spent one of his rare holidays. Two women had been of the party, though in essence it was a man's affair. One was a lovely girl engaged to one of the young men, and the other was a sister of one of the most brilliant of the party.

Of all these people David had written to me in his daily letters, but especially of this sister. I knew from him that she was not beautiful, but clever and lively and witty; that she not only equalled the young men in whatever was being discussed, but shone above them all in imagination and humour,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

and excelled them in the games of mental skill they played. I knew, too, that she had met David very much more than the half way in their warm friendship which was necessary to win him from sensitive distrust. I knew also from his letters that among this high-spirited, confident, successful crew, in his heart he was bitter and lonely, and that this girl was the only one with whom he had felt easy

I had merely to give a swift look at his face as he strode in at the gate to see the terrible cloud of melancholy which was hanging low over his spirit, and blotting out like the blackest night all light, all joy, all love. Without a word he flung himself in his armchair in the living-room, staring in front of him or at me, while I spoke to him of everyday affairs.

The elder children were at school; the baby playing with a neighbour's child I prayed they might not come in just yet, but in a moment I saw them coming down the road. I ran out and told them to do an errand for me and then play in the meadow

## WORLD WITHOUT END

"Daddy has come home, but he's very tired," I explained, but before they could run off he was there.

"Why are you keeping the children away?" he asked.

"I only thought you were rather tired," I replied, "and that I'd get you your tea in peace while they played out of doors."

"Why should I be tired when I've just had a fortnight of idleness and not a stroke of work done and none to do—not a book from the *Chronicle*—and my article back from the *New Weekly*. Tired! Tired is not what I am. I'm sick of the whole of life—of myself chiefly, of you and the children. You must hate me and despise me, but you can't hate me as much as I hate the whole business, and as I despise myself for not putting an end to it."

Not waiting to have the tea I had been getting ready for him, he strode out, and up the hill through the wood to his study.

After a while the children came in to tea quietly, with questioning looks at me.

"Daddy has gone up to the study,"

## WORLD WITHOUT END

I said. "So we'll have tea."

Elizabeth's face fell "Oh, and I've picked him such a lovely bunch of primroses. Look, there are 35 flowers, 35 buds, and 35 leaves, because he's 35, and when he comes I'll give him 35 kisses."

"Not to-night," I said. "To-morrow perhaps You must go to bed early."

He did not return from the study till late. I put the supper to keep hot, and went to the gate at the end of the garden that opened on to the meadow from which the wooded hill rose. I listened with anxiously strained ears in the perfect silence for the sound of his striding through the dead leaves and cracking twigs that were ankle deep in the path down the wood. Generally he coo-eed to me as he neared home, but the squeaking of the bats and the owls' wild cries were all I heard. Fear was in my heart, as it always was when this melancholy of David's brooded over him and over us all. Perhaps he would never come down the hill again. . . What was he doing? What thinking—up there among the trees? How late it was!



## WORLD WITHOUT END

How hungry he must be ! What agony was he going through ? How little, how terribly little I could do for him. A dead branch snapped with a loud noise. My heart stood still for a second, and then hearing his heavy step I turned to go in, feeling slightly faint now that I became conscious of what I had feared.

Soon he was in the living room.

“ Hello ! ” I said, “ Supper is all ready, and I should think you are ready too.”

His face was pale and haggard, his lips tightly shut together, his body bent with a fearful weariness.

“ Yes, I suppose I must eat. But why have you sat up for me ? I don’t want your fussing about me. I know what I am. I know what I’ve done to you. Don’t stand there looking grey and worn till I could hate you for it. Go to bed, go to bed. Take Elizabeth with you. I’ll sleep in her bed, though why I eat and sleep God knows I’m the man who always comes home to his supper.”

When I lifted the child out of her bed into

## WORLD WITHOUT END

mine she said, "Is this a treat, Mummy?"

"Yes, a lovely treat"

And she curled herself up with a happy sigh.

The starlings were stirring in their nest in the roof just over our bed when I heard him come up, and then I slept.

Another dreadful day. The children avoid him as much as possible, and are afraid to talk at meals. He knows it, and it is fresh torture to his tortured spirit. He tries to make them say they hate him, and they cry and will not. A black gloom is over the house. I dread his going to the study, I dread his coming back. I feel my face stiffen into deep lines. I am possessed with fear. He speaks little, but what he says is said to hurt me and doubly hurt himself. I keep myself hard at work, for if I stopped I should become physically incapable, as spiritually I am paralysed. I should just sit and brood. My soul is in the dark and loneliness and agony with him, but my body has to work, my tongue to make conversation with the children. I drag through it all as

## WORLD WITHOUT END

if I were weighted with chains.

Of the children, Elizabeth is least affected by this gloom. She adores her father and is his favourite, and the next day when he asks her to go with him to the study she joyfully assents, bargaining that he will carry her some of the way on his back. Then I know the worst is over.

By the noon post come two letters, one from his chief editor, and one in unknown writing, but I guess whose it is.

He is still cold and silent to me. I know the strain of these days shows in my face, and I do things clumsily. Tears are very near my eyes, which before were dry and burning. If only I could be alone to cry and cry. But of course I can't.

The letter, as I guessed, is from Margaret, the new friend

"Margaret wants to come here for a night. Can we have her? She's walking from Haslemere, and on to Winchester. Shall I say yes or no?"

So this wonder of women is coming, and I am glad.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

For somehow, though the thought of meeting strangers, particularly women, fills me with a morbid dread, with her I feel it will be different. But all the same I feel that I shall not be in any way what she will expect David's wife to be, and this old fear of letting him down to his friends persists. So I write to her, telling her what my fear is, and I dare say revealing to her much more about myself than I had an idea of.

I was busy all the morning making the cottage look its best : scrubbing, polishing, and making cakes. The children and I picked flowers for the rooms—for Margaret's room a shallow bowl of white violets.

David was calm now, but I was still shut out from his love and kindness. He had gone to the study to finish some work, and I was to meet Margaret along the road. I was happily excited, but too conscious of where I fell short of what David's wife should be.

Not far from the village we met.

"You are Margaret!" and "You are Jenny!" was what we said, as we stood for

## WORLD WITHOUT END

a moment with hands still held. We looked into each other's faces, not inquiringly as if we should say, "Now what are you like, I wonder," but as familiar friends we met; and as friends whose hearts are open to each other we turned together towards the village.

I took her up to her little room of which the window opened to the meadow and the wooded hills beyond

"You are Margaret!" and "You are Jenny!" we said again, as if Margaret could be no other, and Jenny could be no other, and we kissed. While we were unpacking her rucksack, laughing over the way a pretty frock was stuffed in with books and shoes and sponge bag, David's coo-ee came from the wood, and she, leaning out of the window, sent a clear, sweet coo-ee back to him. I hurried her downstairs, and showed her the path "You go to meet him while I butter the potato cakes; the children are there too."

I thought: 'He will be glad to have her. If only I could slip away, so that he would

## WORLD WITHOUT END

not have the knowledge of my sadness to trouble him ; for he punishes himself through me, and all is distorted and wrong '

Soon they came in, David with a child on his shoulders ; and all their hands are full of flowers : celandines, catkins, violets, and primroses ; and I see that the children have accepted Margaret as one of the family. David still looks pale and weary, but he talks eagerly to Margaret, and is at his best. The shadow over David and me is still there, but if our secret hearts are cold and desolate, the surface of life at any rate is irradiated by warmth and laughter and talk. And as he talks and she responds so quickly his face looks less haggard and the eyes less weary, and I want to thank her.

David goes to do some gardening, and Margaret comes to help me in putting the children to bed. They clamour for songs and stories, of which it turns out she knows lots. When I am tucking them up they say :

“ Do you like Margaret, Mummy ? ”

“ Yes, very much.”

And they each say “ So do I.”

## WORLD WITHOUT END

And I know by that "So do I" that the seal of approval has been irrevocably set on her. She is as happy with us as we with her.

"You go and talk to David in the garden. I've got several things to do in the house," I say.

"Let me help you."

"No, no. He'll like to show you the garden."

More than all I want to be alone, and I want him to be happy with Margaret, until I am sure all is well with him again. It is all mysterious to me why this un-love must be. He can comfort me out of any unhappiness with a word or a kiss, just as with a word he can chill me almost to death. But my love seems to mock me with its impotence to help him. And yet I know he is relying on me to wait for him till he can come to me.

At supper Margaret praises my cooking, and David is pleased, and again he is gay and the talk flashes between them. I join in now and then, and the talk takes a turn that reminds me of some little village con-

## WORLD WITHOUT END

tretemps that has happened the other day. And David says sharply, "Yes, that is you all over, Jenny. You try with your idiotic kindness to please everybody, and succeed in pleasing nobody, me least of all." Margaret looks up to see if this is a joke, and she finds David's face full of anger and bitterness, and mine unhappily bewildered, trying to smile as if indeed it was a joke.

"Can't you see what a fool you make of yourself?" he adds.

Oh, if only I could slip away to leave him in the peace that I so unwillingly disturb! Margaret's face is full of astonished trouble. She looks at me, but I can give her no sign.

Soon we are sitting smoking and talking. They do most of the talking. I sit under the lamp sewing, not knowing whether it is best to try to talk, or what. But all seems going well when he says:

"Can't you speak, or are you paying me out?"

So I try to join in, though I am sick with misery. The evening is spoilt, and bed is suggested though it is early yet.



## WORLD WITHOUT END

"I'm not going to bed yet," he says.  
"I'm going out to walk on the hill to leave myself there or find myself, I don't know which."

"Good night," Margaret says to him.  
"Good luck to you on the hill."

When Margaret and I turn from the gate to the house after David has gone, I see that her face is glowing, her eyes are bright, and she is smiling to herself, and is so wrapt in a secret happiness that for a moment she forgets me holding the door open for her. She looks towards the hill sharply black in the moonlight, and waves her hand to it, still smiling, still wrapt, and suddenly I know that she loves him. Then, as I stand gazing at her with a new vision, the lamp from the house illuminating her face, she drops her head on my shoulder, and I put my arms round her.

"You love him," I whisper, and though she does not reply, her heart beating so near mine tells me again what I know. I feel again that strange sensation of ageless wisdom and tenderness that I have so

## WORLD WITHOUT END

often felt for David.

"Dear, dear Margaret, we are closer than ever we guessed we could be, aren't we?"

"Oh, Jenny, is it like that, can it be like that?" she says, raising her head.

We sit together on the little bench inside the porch looking out to the meadow and the hill where our beloved seeks for what we cannot give him, love him as we do.

"You see how it is with us now," I say. "He has shut his heart against me, and love has no place in his heart. He cannot help it. His spirit is too weary for love, his discontent too bitter. I have learnt to accept it—that for a while it must be like that—and to wait for him to come back. The worst to bear is the way he seems driven to hurt himself the more by hurting me. If love could come to him again through you, Margaret, it would be like a new heaven and a new earth. I should have my own sadness, but I should not grudge you his love, nor him yours, for I know that what is between David and me is eternal; nothing can crumble the solid rock of that something

## WORLD WITHOUT END

which we have made together. So you see, my dear, there is something irrevocable that cannot be changed. If he could love you, Margaret, I could not help but be the sharer, though how or why I cannot tell you—only I know it would be so. Do you understand a bit what I mean? You ought to be loved, Margaret, and if I were a man, if I could be David, I should love and cherish you. But there! I'm not, and you love David, and if on the hill-top he finds you it will be right, and I shall be like the old mother, I often feel, to you both, who will be like my children."

So we sit in the porch, drawn into this strange union. She speaks little. Her head is on my breast, but every now and then she presses my hand in understanding of what I try to make plain to her. Then we speak of him, of his beauty and tenderness, of his work and the fastidiousness of his taste, and his hatred of hypocrisy and jargon and cant. The time goes on into hours. It is late but warm, and the night is bright with moonlight.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

At last we hear his coo-ee from the wood, and soon he comes walking with his long swinging stride over the meadow, the moon casting his gigantic shadow almost to our feet. Coo-ee we both call, and before we start to meet him we hold each other close, and kiss without a word. Soon we are running through the dew-wet grass.

“Quickly, quickly!” he says. “I’ve heard the first nightingale over there in the hazel copse. I’ve never known one so early. You must come and hear him. He’s not in full song, but he’s got his best note of all.”

He takes us each by an arm, and we run with the moon full in our faces. I look up at his face all eager excitement and joy. Soon we are at the edge of the copse, dappled with moonlight. The still air is full of the scent of bluebells. We stand arm in arm in tense expectation, not daring to give our breathlessness relief. Then out of the silence, out of the scent-laden, moonlit, dappled copse, comes a long clear, vibrating note of purest tone. Low and

## WORLD WITHOUT END

tender it is at first, but as it draws out the sweetness becomes strength, the tenderness passion, until in that wild note it is as if God speaks and we understand, but what we understand we do not know. All pain, all ecstasy, all despair, all love are expressed.

For some seconds we stand amazed by what has been revealed to us. Then the scent of the bluebells comes to us again, and at our feet a frog jumps through the grass

"We are knowing, but that nightingale has wisdom, even more than solemn old Jenny," David says, and bends down and, taking my face between his hands, kisses the tip of my nose

"Kiss Margaret too," I say.

And he kisses her, and she him. And we return to the house.

When for a moment we stand saying goodnight at our bedroom doors, Margaret whispers as I take her candle in : "I'm so glad he has found you, dear Jenny."

David does not kiss her again, but says,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

"It's good to have you here, Margaret. Sleep well."

Elizabeth is sleeping in our bed, and David looks ruefully at her.

"Let's sleep in the copse among the bluebells to-night. There's that roll of camp bedding we can easily carry there."

But I say, "No, no, not to-night. To-morrow night, when we are alone we will."

"Why, Jenny, you're crying. You are not sad any more?"

"No, not really crying. A few tears just came."

We get into bed—the child between us, our hands meeting over her little curled-up body.

"David," I say, "you'll go a few miles of the way with Margaret to-morrow, won't you?"

"Yes, of course I will. We'll all go and make it a picnic day for the children."

"No, you go. I want you to."

"All right, but you like her, don't you?"

"Yes. I've never met a woman whom I love so much."

## WORLD WITHOUT END

His voice grows sleepy, and soon his hold of my hand slackens, and he is asleep. I lean over the child and kiss him

I can't sleep, my heart is too full.

I lie thinking of the strange bewilderment of things that is our life. I cannot understand it: birth, love, death, and all the different kinds of suffering; the loneliness of each one in spite of friendship and love and sympathy; David, and me, and Margaret . . . What can it mean?

My eyes close but sleep will not come, until out of the darkness I hear far away in the copse the trembling note of the nightingale, and peace comes to my troubled heart.

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## XIII

THEN the war came.

David and Philip had cycled together into Gloucester staying with friends on the way, taking a week or more to reach a little village beyond Ledbury where some Americans David had lately met were staying, and where later the two little girls and myself were to join them.

War was declared on the day that I was to start. I shall never forget that journey—the disorganised train service, the crowds at the stations, reservists being seen off by friends, trains full of men going to join the ranks, and complete chaos everywhere. We did not arrive at our destination till the small hours of the following morning, having had to do the last part of the journey by motor car. I remember the drive of



## WORLD WITHOUT END

about fifteen miles through the Malvern Hills under a large harvest moon. We stopped men to inquire the way, for I had no idea where the house was, and the village constable asked most suspiciously who we were and what was our errand, peering into the car and seeing only an anxious woman and two little girls fast asleep. But such were the times that a few days later, when our adventure had become nothing more than a good story, a policeman called to say that he must make enquiries about us to satisfy people who had suggested that we were spies.

The news of war had of course preceded us, but no excitement disturbed the peace of that beautiful orchard country, with its wealth of choicest apples, pears and plums hanging red and golden and purple from the branches of innumerable fruit trees, which bore in very truth fruit that were jewels of great price.

We living there with the farmer and his wife, and in the constant society of people who became our intimate and beloved

## WORLD WITHOUT END

friends, did not then realise all that brooded over our lives. We spent those happy weeks in the open air, in the evenings sitting with our friends and talking—talking of people and life and poetry, for our friend was a poet. Between him and David a most wonderful friendship grew up. He believed in David and loved him, understanding, as no other man had ever understood, his strange complex temperament. The influence of this man on David's intellectual life was profound, and to it alone of outside influences is to be attributed that final and fullest expression of himself which David now found in writing poetry. There began during that holiday a kind of spiritual and intellectual fulfilment which was to culminate two years later in his death. In that short time, most of it spent in the army, David was to pour out in poetry all the splendid experience of sadness and beauty; and in his poems is expressed for ever the tender loveliness of the English country.

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## XIV

BUT now indeed things were bad for us, and after our friends sailed back to America taking Philip with them for a year, David became torn in his mind as to what he ought to do. There was hardly any literary work to be had, and we were hard put to it to keep going. He got one or two commissions for special articles having an indirect war interest, but naturally the papers did not want his reflective and critical essays, and reviewing had almost ceased. Besides the anxiety of providing for us all there was the deep conviction that he ought to enlist. He hated the newspaper patriotism. He saw through the lies and deception of the press as he had always seen through untruths. He was not even carried away by the abnormal condition of the national

## WORLD WITHOUT END

emotion. Indeed his attitude to the war was inexplicable to his father who was roused to fury by what he thought was his son's disloyalty when David suggested that the Germans were as brave as the English, and that 'cold steel' would bring fear to the hearts of any man be he German or English. The old antagonism broke out again and was never healed.

One day when he was in London ostensibly looking for work, he sent me a telegram telling me he had enlisted in the Artists' Rifles. I had known that the struggle going on in his spirit would end like this, and I had tried to prepare myself for it. But when that telegram came I felt suddenly faint and despairing. "No, no, no," was all I could say; "not that." But I knew it had to be and that it was right. He was—so the telegram said—to come home in a few days a soldier.

During our life there had been many bitter partings and many joyous home-comings. The bitterness of the partings has faded from my consciousness; I know

## WORLD WITHOUT END

it was so, but I forget how and why. But the memory of the joy and hope and happiness of the reunions has stayed with me, and for ever, so it seems to me, part of me will stand at the gate and listen for his step, watch for his long stride; feel the strong embrace of his arms, and his kiss.

After a terrific furbishing of the house, so that wherever you looked everything—the floors, the crockery on the dresser, the brass candlesticks—shone with cleanliness and neatness, I went to meet him at the station. As I hurried along the country road I caught up village people in twos and threes, all in their best, evidently out on some festive errand; they called to me as I passed, ‘Going to welcome the V.C.?’ ‘No,’ I called back gaily. ‘My soldier has no medals yet.’ As I got nearer the station the road was fringed with people from the villages round, some of whom I knew. ‘You’ll get a good view of him if you stay here,’ said one. ‘Oh no, I must be there when the train comes in,’ I replied; and flushed and excited I rushed on. The

## WORLD WITHOUT END

platform was crowded, the town band was there, and the town officials. It seemed right and natural to me that there should be all this fuss, and it accorded with my own joyous excitement, but I stood away from the crowd at the end of the platform. The crowd could have their hero, but I wanted my soldier all to myself. The train came in

I did not see the official welcome of the V. C., for David got out just where I stood. I noticed with a shock that his hair was cut very short, and that the thinness of his face was accentuated, but that he looked trim and soldierly in his uniform.

As he stooped to kiss me I smelt for the first time that queer sour smell of khaki, so different from David's usual smell of peaty Harris tweed and tobacco. What a difference the clothes made! The stiffness and tightness too were so strange after his easy loose things. I could not now walk with my hand in his pocket and his hand over mine.

I looked up at his face as we walked along, and in a flash I saw the sensitiveness,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

the suffering, the strength and the sincerity which had determined for him the rightness of this step. I was proud of him, and my heart silently responded to the cheers with which the crowd welcomed their hero. I passed again the woman who had spoken to me. 'You be luckier than us,' she said, 'with a V.C. all of your own.' David saluted her, and I nodded in acknowledgement of the truth of what she said.

The children were excited and eager to hear all about soldiers, and after tea, as we sat round the table polishing his buttons and badges and buckles, he told us about enlisting, and how he was now a soldier for the duration of the war. He had already learned some soldiers' songs which had good choruses in which we all joined.

The three days he had before joining his regiment were busy with gardening and putting papers and books in order in the hill-top study, and making preparations for a long absence from home. We had one glorious walk together. On that day he discarded his khaki, and but for his shorn

## WORLD WITHOUT END

nair, which I could not get used to, was his old self. We talked of ways and means, of the children and the garden, of the men mostly painters and writers like himself who were to be his companions and to learn with him the uncongenial business of warfare. Sometimes, walking through familiar country which we loved, we talked of that, and sometimes in the old way we walked silently. I remember thinking, 'Oh if only we could walk on like this for ever, and for ever it be summer, and for ever we be happy!' And then I remembered that after all the war itself was the reason of this very walk, and had its part in the depth of our deep content with the English country and with each other. Because of the war our souls were now drawn into the circle that was our love, and we understood and loved each other completely.

The war ruthlessly made clear the difference between the various people who lived in the village. All the able-bodied village men had enlisted—the young men out for life and adventure, the older because



## WORLD WITHOUT END

they felt it their duty to do so. Only the old and infirm were left

The school as a whole stood for pacifism, and though the toll of honour in the school hall lengthened each day as old boys fell, the spirit of the place was anti-war. Young athletic men in sweaters and shorts carried on the great work of co-education, and at the village debating society tried to hold their own against the onslaughts of the more instinctive villagers and landed proprietors. I could hardly believe in the sincerity of the men who said they would not fight for anything, and if they were sincere I thought them even more contemptible. When I told a leading member of the staff that David had enlisted, he said disapprovingly, "That's the last thing I should have expected him to do." How I hated him for that remark, and hated more the schoolmaster smugness from which it came. So by degrees I became antagonistic towards the school people and all they stood for. I felt stifled—especially at that agonising time—by the self-confident righteousness, by the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

principles which proved so irresistible to hypocrisy, by the theories which remained in the head and never reached the heart. A meeting was called at the school at which it was decided that, as the men of the village were all at the war, the cottagers' gardens should be dug and planted by pacifist members of the staff, 'for we realise,' they said to the women who composed the audience, 'how much you depend on your gardens, and that the soil is too heavy for you to tackle.' The women clapped for the vote of thanks, but were not much impressed with the magnanimity of this offer, because being wiser than their betters they knew that if they did not dig their gardens themselves no one else would. And so indeed it turned out.

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## XV

**D**AVID had been in the army a year. He hated it all—the stupidity, the injustice, the red tape, and the conditions of camp life. But he worked hard to perfect himself in the job he had undertaken to become a proficient soldier, and it was with real pride that he brought home his first stripe for me to sew on his sleeve. He practised the Guard's smart salute, and was meticulously careful that his uniform was in order, with buttons and buckles polished, and puttees wound in regulation style.

The map reading and the work with the prismatic compass he enjoyed; he also got a certain satisfaction from the route marches in Essex—a county he had not known before, which he found interesting and beautiful. His own inner life was sub-

## WORLD WITHOUT END

merged under these strange and difficult conditions, only coming to the surface in the odd moments when he could be alone, when he found infinite comfort and satisfaction in expressing himself in his poems. He offered some of these poems to various editors, but no one had any room for such quiet meditative verse, in which the profound love and knowledge of his country were too subtle in their patriotism for the nation's mood. This failure was a great disappointment to him, and it was difficult for him in the face of it and with his lack of self confidence to believe the appreciative criticism he obtained from his friends.

The payment for these poems would have been a useful addition to our meagre income, but more valuable than that would have been the encouragement. The public acknowledgment of his worth as a writer of either prose or poetry he was never in his life to have. Death came leading Fame by the hand

But his old periods of dark agony had gone for ever. The sensitive introspective quality of his nature remained, but the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

black despair had given way to calm acceptance. He was not resigned to the army life: he hated it, and saw clearly and without any illusion its cruelty, its madness, its inhuman mechanism, its cold cynicism; but having undertaken the job there was nothing that he shirked, and to the end his only fear was of being afraid.

When the time came for him to be drafted from the Artists' Rifles to a unit, he worked so hard at mathematics, which he had no aptitude for and only the most elementary knowledge of, that he passed high in his examination and was given a commission in the Artillery. In this mathematical work he was greatly helped by Philip, whose abilities lay in that direction, and a new and lovely relation sprang up between father and son.

When David came home on his short leaves he always spent some hours in his study at the top of the hill. He loved the little room looking out to the downs and beyond to the sea, and here he wrote several of his loveliest poems. If he had

## WORLD WITHOUT END

no special work to do he browsed among his books, or weeded his herb garden, or made a great fire of shavings from Sinclair's workshop to air the place. This room was his special sanctuary, and I only went up there when he was away to open the window and keep it dusted.

One day something happened which precipitated my departure from the village, to whose atmosphere I was becoming more and more antagonistic. I received a letter from Mrs. Sinclair, whose husband, our friend, was at the Front, saying that she needed an extra room for a woman she was engaging as a companion, and requesting me to remove as soon as possible all David's belongings from the study. It would be impossible to express the emotion with which I read those few curt words. I wrote at once saying there was some mistake, pointing out that her husband had granted the study to David for as long as he wanted it. I told her, moreover, all that the study meant to David, how now that he was living such an unnatural life in the army the little

## WORLD WITHOUT END

room had become on his leaves a special sanctuary, a blessed spot where he could be quiet among his books, a place that had become his by every claim of use and association and affection. In passionate language I begged her to consider all this. Her reply was, 'The place is mine, and I must have it; please remove your husband's things as soon as possible.' I wrote her a letter of furious denunciation. Nothing that I felt I left unsaid, and my heart was full of bitter anger and despair.

The following day I was alone in the house. I had just washed my hair which was hanging in wet strands when a knock came at the door, and answering it I found a member of the school staff standing there with my letter to Mrs. Sinclair in his hand. He explained that he had come to ask me on Mrs. Sinclair's behalf to withdraw what I had said, murmuring some platitudes about brotherly love. I invited him into our living room. Sitting before him white and trembling, with my black hair wet and lank hanging over my shoulders, I must have

## WORLD WITHOUT END

looked like a witch ; and so in the end I believe he thought me, for I poured out all the antagonism for the school and its disciples which had been accumulating since I had come to live among these people. All my despair on David's account I vented in scornful and contemptuous words. Nothing that my visitor could interpolate could stop the verbal flood that surged from my heart, and taking the letter from his hand I told him there was not one word which I would retract because there was not one word which I did not feel to be true. Dismayed and speechless the poor man hurriedly left me still sitting by the table. When he had gone, burying my face on my arms outstretched over the table I cried till my heart was dry of tears.

The next day with the help of an old man and a donkey-cart I emptied David's beloved study of his books, manuscripts, and pictures. It took me all day, for I had to carry the books a few at a time the whole up-hill length of the garden to the lane, the old man being too feeble to do anything



## WORLD WITHOUT END

but take them from me and pack them into the cart. Only Mrs. Sinclair's face at her window watching me gave me strength for that tremendous task.

This incident, which at the time assumed such momentous significance, finally sickened me of the place, and as Philip was being apprenticed to an engineer at Walthamstow, I decided to move somewhere within reach of him.

David, who had accepted the loss of the study in the same spirit in which he accepted everything which affected himself and for which the war was responsible, was camping in Epping Forest. In this neighbourhood he found us without much difficulty a cottage standing in the grounds of a nursery garden which had run wild owing to the lack of men to keep it in order. It was, David warned me, a horrid little place, but it was within cycling distance of Philip's works. I could take no interest in a house which David was not to share. All I wanted was to leave the village in whose county of hangers and plateaux, downs and

## WORLD WITHOUT END

deep coombes we had spent twelve years. I loved the place. Every hill side, every wood and meadow, every green lane and steep chalk track, almost every tree had its associations. There our baby had been born, there I had grown from a girl to a woman, and learnt much about nature and people and life. It is the country of White and Cobbett, and is even now as it was in their days. The line of its hills, the windings of its lanes, the details of its villages and farms are imprinted on my heart for ever. Walks that David and I took there I shall never forget ; even our talks as we went are fresh in my memory. The bare juniper-dotted hill with the clumps of pine trees at the top, at whose feet and crest we had lived, whose multitudinous but tiny cowslips, orchids, milkwort and violet we so joyously welcomed when they came and shot the grey turf with various colour ; up whose steep side I had watched David stride away angry and weary of everything, or down which he had run perilously with a child on his shoulder ; this hill which had become

## WORLD WITHOUT END

almost human for us with its austerity, friendliness and tenderness, is more than any other place in England linked with David in my memory and my dreams.

But now my love was overwhelmed by dim forebodings which my natural happiness, hopefulness and vitality were powerless to subdue, and which robbed me of the courage to stay there and make believe to continue a life from which without David all significance had gone : forebodings which though vague and unformulated urged me to wrench myself from these associations before they became unbearable to me.

David could not get leave from camp to help me with the move, but a week or two before we left he came home to say good-bye to those hangers and our hill ; and at this period, so fraught with sad and poignant thoughts and memories, some of his loveliest poems were written. He read them to me in the evening when we were alone I could not speak about them when he asked me for my criticism, so deeply had their beauty and significance sunk into my heart.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

The jerry-built cottage is made sacred to me because of those last evenings with David there. Only on a few more occasions were we to sit together by our own fireside, and as if I knew it, my heart hurt with unshed-able tears, and, when he had gone, with a bitterness new and dreadful to it.

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## XVI

THE move was a grotesque nightmare of incompetent drunken men and books hurled pell mell into cases, but somehow or other we and our goods arrived at the cottage in Essex. It was a horrible house on the top of a high hill in Epping forest, ugly, cold, and inconvenient—an impossible place to make either pretty or comfortable. Single handed it took me a long time to get things ship-shape, and even when all was done there was a make-shift feeling about the place which could not be eradicated, and which I hated it for

It was October, and already the first snow of what was to be a terrible winter had fallen. Philip had to leave the house at six o'clock in the morning, and bicycle some miles to the engineering workshops

## WORLD WITHOUT END

where he was apprenticed. He and I got up soon after five in the dark bitterly cold mornings. There was no proper cooking stove ; so after lighting a fire in the sitting room we made porridge and fried bacon on a primus. Then off Philip would go in the darkness with the stars still twinkling over the forest as if deriding its stark immobility.

Sometimes I would go back to bed beside Elizabeth, but more often as the dawn slowly filtered through the trees I would sit by the fire not thinking, not reading, emptied of all emotion, even loneliness—as if waiting for I knew not what. An unutterable fear, an icy chill had taken possession of my heart. I was not always conscious of it, but it had the effect of making me feel that life had stopped, that it was simply marking time until something should happen that would set it going again. What that something would be I didn't ask, but dimly supposed it would be the end of the war.

When David wrote to me that early in

## WORLD WITHOUT END

the new year he would be going to France, the fear and the icy chill took a closer grip, and the sense of statically existing—not living—grew more intense. Yet on the surface all was as usual—the housework done, the children played with, happy hours spent wooding in the snow-covered forest. My daily letters to David were written, and only then as I wrote to him did the chill melt away; thought and feeling returned, and words in which to utter them ran as ever swiftly from my pen.

His letters were full of his work and of his life in the various camps to which he was sent to complete his artillery training. Often he would enclose one or two poems, and these with their quiet sad beauty, their feeling for the English country, and most of all their intimate revelations of the soul of the man whom I knew so well, and whose love was the core of my being—these poems sank into my heart like prayers.

He wrote that his last leave was imminent, but would not include Christmas, which was now a few weeks distant. We each knew

## WORLD WITHOUT END

what we felt about this, and neither of us said a word. We had always made so much of festivals, but that we should not be together for this Christmas was all a part of that stoppage of living.

I remember the day this double news came. The children had been invited to a party at the house of a poet—a very dear friend. I had made Polly a pretty dress of some cheap but unusual material, and at the party several of the mothers came up to me and praised the child and the frock. But the sentence “And Jenny, I can’t get home for Christmas” thumped out a sort of tune in my head, and though with my ears I heard “How lovely your baby looks,” “How cleverly you have made the frock,” I listened with all my being to “And Jenny, I can’t get home for Christmas.” Our friends too were affected by the news, and during the gaiety of the party we comforted each other with unexpressed but none the less understood sympathy.

‘Christmas must be prepared for, however,’ I thought, and I became busy with



## WORLD WITHOUT END

cakes and puddings and what I could afford of Christmas fare, which was little enough. The children with me planned the box I should pack for David, with something of everything, including crackers and sweets, and they began to make their presents for him. Into these preparations which before had always gone with such happy zest the same feeling of unreality entered and my eagerness was assumed for the sake of the children. But they too found it difficult to anticipate with joy a Christmas so strange, and the activities fell flat. Outside circumstances mattered as never before—our poverty, the severity of the weather, the dreariness of the house—and over us all an indefinable shadow fell.

But a miracle happened. Suddenly this Christmas of all Christmases became the most joyous; the snow-bound forest sparkled like Aladdin's Cave; the house was transformed into a festive bower of holly and ivy and fir boughs, and our listlessness was changed into animated happiness and excitement.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

David after all *was* coming home for Christmas !

The letter telling me this arrived by the first post along with one in a strange hand which I opened first, little suspecting what news David's contained. Inside this letter was a cheque for £20 made out to me and signed by the name of a writer of distinction whom I did not know. I stared and stared, and fumbling in the envelope for some explanation found a note from Margaret telling me that she had been asked to forward this to me as a gift from a private fund. What could I not do with £20 ! I had never had so much in my life. But oh, if only David had been coming home !

Seeing his letter, which in my bewilderment I had forgotten, I read only the first words : ' My dearest, my draft leave will include Christmas after all.' I raced upstairs to the sleeping children. " Wake up, wake up ! Daddy is coming home for Christmas. He's coming home. He'll be here to-morrow, and I've got £20 to spend, and we'll all have the most wonderful

## WORLD WITHOUT END

presents; and oh, he's coming home." Half-crying and half-laughing I lifted the children out of bed, and we danced in a ring and sang 'He's coming home for Christmas' to the tune of 'For he's a jolly good fellow.'

How we worked that day to get all ready! I snatched a couple of hours to go to London and do the shopping. I bought for David the best Jaeger sleeping bag and thick gauntlet gloves and a volume of Shakespeare's sonnets, and for the children a real magic lantern with moving slides, and a special present for each one. I brought fruit and sweets and luxuries we had never tasted before, and wine as well. A frock of David's favourite red was my present to myself, and secretly for the baby the children and I dug a little Christmas tree out of the garden and loaded it with toys and trinkets, and candles ready to light.

Life was not paralysed now, but with new-found vigour sped along eager and joyous. Nor did time stand still. I was up half the night arranging the greenery that the

## WORLD WITHOUT END

children had ransacked the forest for during the day, and the finishing touches to all that was to make this Christmas of all Christmases shine above its peers.

Never did my strong body serve me better, for after an hour or two's sleep and up again in the starry morning I felt revived, wishing God-speed to the hour that would bring David home. Besides all this the feast had now to be prepared—the great turkey stuffed, the pastry made, the dessert arranged in dishes. No one was idle. Philip brought in a great pile of logs; Elizabeth sat busily finishing the story she was writing about a horse, for her father's present; while Polly embroidered with gay-coloured wools a picture of a butterfly outlined on cardboard and pricked beforehand with holes for her blunt-pointed needle. Everybody was talking or singing or teasing me by pretending to look into places where secrets were known to be concealed. I had to stop the chopping of parsley to thread Polly's needle, and Philip cleaning the family's shoes kept his eye on

## WORLD WITHOUT END

the clock for when it should be time for him and Elizabeth to go and meet David.

"To-morrow is Christmas Day," they kept saying. "To-morrow is Christmas day." In the midst of all this happy activity and looking forward, that word 'to-morrow' struck a note I could not help hearing, but I would not let it mean anything to me then. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow—the word was trying to shatter the joy of my soul with its linell-like reverberations.

"To-day Daddy is coming home. Soon he'll be here, and after you've been to sleep you'll wake up and to-day will be Christmas day," I said. "Don't talk of to-morrow when to-day is here and is so lovely."

"Don't you want Christmas to come then, Mummy?"

"Yes, but I think to-day is a nicer day than to-morrow."

"I see what mother means," Philip said, "now that the war's on, some to-morrows are bound to be sad for lots of people, and

## WORLD WITHOUT END

*she* doesn't want to think of them, do you, Mummy."

"Yes, it's a bit like that. But look at the clock. If you don't hurry, to-day will pay you out and vanish before you've met Daddy."

Philip and Elizabeth were soon ready to go to the bottom of the hill at the cross roads about a mile from the house, where they were to meet David. Polly and I stayed behind to toast the crumpets and boil the kettle. The last stitches were being put into the butterfly, and I had a piece of blue ribbon ready to thread through the top to hang it up by.

"I'm glad I didn't choose the duck. I think Daddy likes butterflies much better than ducks."

"I'm sure he does. He showed me once a butterfly called a painted lady, but this one must be an embroidered lady."

"Oh no, Mummy, this is not a lady butterfly; it's a father one"

"Hark, what's that! Let's go to the door and listen."

## WORLD WITHOUT END

But no sound came from the windless snow-laden forest.

"I wonder if I ever shall see a real Christmas tree like the one Elizabeth told me about that she had at school with toys and candles," said Polly with a sigh, reminded of the subject by the rows of fir trees still growing in the nursery garden.

"Oh my darling, you shall have everything you ever dreamt of this Christmas." And I catch her up in my arms, and she throws her arms round my neck. While I stand thus the air is cut with David's clear voice calling the old familiar coo-ee; then the sound of voices; then of heavy snow-clogged footsteps; then David at the door. He is here. He is home.

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## XVII

CHRISTMAS had come and gone. The snow still lay deep under the forest trees, which tortured by the merciless wind moaned and swayed as if in exhausted agony. The sky, day after day, was grey with snow that fell often enough to keep the surface white, and to cover again and again the bits of twigs, and sometimes large branches that broke from the heavily laden trees. We wearied for some colour, some warmth, some sound, but desolation and despair seemed to have taken up her dwelling place on the earth, as in our hearts she had entered, do what we would to keep her out. I longed with a passionate longing for some sign of life, of hope, of spring, but none came, and I knew at last none would come.

The last two days of David's leave had



## WORLD WITHOUT END

come. Two days and two nights more we were to be together, and I prayed in my heart, "Oh, let the snow melt and the sky be blue again!" so that the dread which was spoiling these precious hours would lift.

The first days had been busy with friends coming to say good-bye, all bringing presents for David to take out to the front—warm lined gloves, a fountain pen, a box of favourite sweets, books.

This was not a time when words of affection were bearable; so they heaped things that they thought he might need or would like. Everyone who came was full of fun and joking about his being an officer after having had, as it were, to go to school again and learn mathematics, which were so uncongenial to him, but which he had stuck to and mastered with that strange pertinacity that had made him stick to all sorts of unlikely and uncongenial things in his life. They joked about his short hair, and the little moustache he had grown, and about the way he had perfected the Guards' salute. We got large jugs of beer from the inn near

## WORLD WITHOUT END

by to drink his health in, and an end to the War. The hateful cottage became homely and comfortable under the influence of these friends, all so kind and cheerful.

Then in the evenings, when just outside the door the silence of the forest was like a pall covering too heavily the myriads of birds and little beasts that the frost had killed, we would sit by the fire with the children and read aloud to them, and they would sing songs that they had known since their babyhood, and David sang new ones he had learnt in the army—jolly songs with good choruses in which I, too, joined as I busied about getting the supper. Then, when the baby had gone to bed, Elizabeth would sit on his lap, content just to be there, while he and Philip worked out problems or studied maps. It was lovely to see those two so united over this common interest.

But he and I were separated by our dread, and we could not look each other in the eyes, nor dared we be left alone together.

The days had passed in restless energy for us both. He had sawn up a big tree that

## WORLD WITHOUT END

had been blown down at our very door, and chopped the branches into logs, the children all helping. The children loved being with him, for though he was stern in making them build up the logs properly, and use the tools in the right way, they were not resentful of this, but tried to win his rare praise and imitate his skill. Indoors he packed his kit and polished his accoutrement. He loved a good piece of leather, and his Sam Browne and high trench boots shone with a deep, clear lustre. The brass, too, reminded him of the brass ornaments we had often admired when years ago we had lived on a farm and knew every detail of a plough team's harness. We all helped with the buttons and buckles and badges to turn him out the smart officer it was his pride to be. For he entered into this soldiering which he hated in just that same spirit of thoroughness of which I have spoken before. We talked, as we polished, of those past days: "Do you remember when Jingo, the grey leader of the team, had colic, and Turner the ploughman led her about Blooming Meadow for

## WORLD WITHOUT END

hours, his eyes streaming with tears because he thought she was going to die? And how she would only eat the hay from Blooming Meadow, and not the coarse hay that was grown in Sixteen Acre Meadow for the cows? And do you remember Turner's whip which he carried over his shoulder when he led Darling and Chestnut and Jingo out to the plough? It had fourteen brass bands on the handle, one for every year of his service on the farm." So we talked of old times that the children could remember

And the days went by till only two were left. David had been going through drawers full of letters, tearing up dozens and keeping just one here and there, and arranging manuscripts and note-books and newspaper cuttings all neatly in his desk—his face pale and suffering while he whistled. The children helped and collected stamps from the envelopes, and from the drawers all sorts of useless odds and ends that children love. Philip knew what it all meant, and looked anxiously and dumbly from his father's face to mine.

## WORLD WITHOUT END

And I knew David's agony and he knew mine, and all we could do was to speak sharply to each other. "Now do, for goodness' sake, remember, Jenny, that these are the important manuscripts, and that I'm putting them here, and this key is for the box that holds all important papers like our marriage certificate and the children's birth certificates, and my life insurance policy. You may want them at some time ; so don't go leaving the key about." And I, after a while, "Can't you leave all this unnecessary tidying business, and put up that shelf you promised me ? I hate this room, but a few books on a shelf might make it look a bit more human." "Nothing will improve this room ; so you had better resign yourself to it. Besides, the wall is too rotten for a shelf" "Oh, but you promised." "Well, it won't be the first time I've broken a promise to you, will it ? Nor the last, perhaps."

Oh, God ! melt the snow and let the sky be blue

The last evening comes. The children have taken down the holly and mistletoe and

## WORLD WITHOUT END

ivy, and chopped up the little Christmas-tree to burn. And for a treat Elizabeth and Polly are to have their bath in front of the blazing fire. The big zinc bath is dragged in, and the children undress in high glee, and skip about naked in the warm room, which is soon filled with the sweet smell of the burning greenery. The berries pop, and the fir-tree makes fairy lace, and the holly crackles and roars. The two children get into the bath together, and David scrubs them in turn—they laughing, making the fire hiss with their splashing. The drawn curtains shut out the snow and the starless sky, and the deathly silence out there in the biting cold is forgotten in the noise and warmth of our little room. After the bath David reads to them. First of all he reads Shelley's *The Question* and *Chey Chase*, and then for Polly a favourite Norse tale. They sit in their nightgowns listening gravely, and then, just before they kiss him good-night, while I stand by with the candle in my hand, he says: "Remember while I am away to be kind. Be kind, first of all, to Mummy,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

and after that be kind to everyone and everything." And they all assent together, and joyfully hug and kiss him, and he carries the two girls up, and drops each into her bed.

And we are left alone, unable to hide our agony, afraid to show it. Over supper we talk of the probable front he'll arrive at, of his fellow-officers, and of the unfinished portrait-etching that one of them has done of him and given to me. And we speak of the garden, and where this year he wants the potatoes to be, and he reminds me to put in the beans directly the snow disappears. "If I'm not back in time you'd better get someone to help you with the digging," he says. He reads me some of the poems he has written that I have not heard—the last one of all called *Out in the Dark*. And I venture to question one line, and he says, "Oh no, it's right, Jenny, I'm sure it's right." And I nod because I can't speak, and I try to smile at his assurance.

I sit and stare stupidly at his luggage by the wall, and his roll of bedding, kit-bag, and

## WORLD WITHOUT END

suit-case. He takes out his prismatic compass and explains it to me, but I cannot see, and when a tear drops on to it he just shuts it up and puts it away. Then he says, as he takes a book out of his pocket, "You see, your Shakespeare's *Sonnets* is already where it will always be. Shall I read you some?" He reads one or two to me. His face is grey and his mouth trembles, but his voice is quiet and steady. And soon I slip to the floor and sit between his knees, and while he reads his hand falls over my shoulder and I hold it with mine.

"Shall I undress you by this lovely fire and carry you upstairs in my khaki overcoat?" So he undoes my things, and I slip out of them; then he takes the pins out of my hair, and we laugh at ourselves for behaving as we so often do, like young lovers. "We have never become a proper Darby and Joan, have we?"

"I'll read to you till the fire burns low, and then we'll go to bed." Holding the book in one hand, and bending over me to get the light of the fire on the book, he puts



## WORLD WITHOUT END

his other hand over my breast, and I cover his hand with mine, and he reads from *Antony and Cleopatra*. He cannot see my face, nor I his, but his low, tender voice trembles as he speaks the words so full for us of poignant meaning. That tremor is my undoing. "Don't read any more." I can't bear it." All my strength gives way. I hide my face on his knee, and all my tears so long kept back come convulsively. He raises my head and wipes my eyes and kisses them, and wrapping his greatcoat round me carries me to our bed in the great, bare ice-cold room. Soon he is with me, and we lie speechless and trembling in each other's arms. I cannot stop crying. My body is torn with terrible sobs. I am engulfed in this despair like a drowning man by the sea. My mind is incapable of thought. Only now and again, as they say drowning people do, I have visions of things that have been—the room where my son was born; a day, years after, when we were together walking before breakfast by a stream with hands full of bluebells; and in the kitchen of our

## WORLD WITHOUT END

honeymoon cottage, and I happy in his pride of me. David did not speak except now and then to say some tender word or name, and hold me tightly to him. "I've always been able to warm you, haven't I?" "Yes, your lovely body never feels cold as mine does. How is it that I am so cold when my heart is so full of passion?" "You must have Elizabeth to sleep with you while I am away. But you must not make my heart cold with your sadness, but keep it warm, for no one else but you has ever found my heart, and for you it was a poor thing after all." "No, no, no, your heart's love is all my life. I was nothing before you came, and would be nothing without your love."

So we lay, all night, sometimes talking of our love and all that had been, and of the children, and what had been amiss and what right. We knew the best was that there had never been untruth between us. We knew all of each other, and it was right. So talking and crying and loving in each other's arms we fell asleep as the cold reflected light

## WORLD WITHOUT END

of the snow crept through the frost-covered windows.

David got up and made the fire and brought me some tea, and then got back into bed, and the children clambered in, too, and we sat in a row sipping our tea. I was not afraid of crying any more. My tears had been shed, my heart was empty, stricken with something that tears would not express or comfort. The gulf had been bridged. Each bore the other's suffering. We concealed nothing, for all was known between us. After breakfast, while he showed me where his account books were and what each was for, I listened calmly, and unbelievably he kissed me when I said I, too, would keep accounts. "And here are my poems. I've copied them all out in this book for you, and the last of all is for you. I wrote it last night, but don't read it now . . . It's still freezing. The ground is like iron, and more snow has fallen. The children will come to the station with me ; and now I must be off."

We were alone in my room. He took me in his arms, holding me tightly to him, his

## WORLD WITHOUT END

face white, his eyes full of a fear I had never seen before. My arms were round his neck. "Beloved, I love you," was all I could say. "Jenny, Jenny, Jenny," he said, "remember that whatever happens, all is well between us for ever and ever" And hand in hand we went downstairs and out to the children, who were playing in the snow.

A thick mist hung everywhere, and there was no sound except, far away in the valley, a train shunting. I stood at the gate watching him go; he turned back to wave until the mist and the hill hid him. I heard his old call coming up to me. "Coo-ee!" he called. "Coo-ee!" I answered, keeping my voice strong to call again. Again through the muffled air came his "Coo-ee." And again went my answer like an echo. "Coo-ee" came fainter next time with the hill between us, but my "Coo-ee" went out of my lungs strong to pierce to him as he strode away from me. "Coo-ee!" So faint now, it might be only my own call flung back from the thick air and muffling snow. I put my hands up to my mouth to make a trumpet,

## WORLD WITHOUT END

but no sound came. Panic seized me, and I ran through the mist and the snow to the top of the hill, and stood there a moment dumbly, with straining eyes and ears. There was nothing but the mist and the snow and the silence of death.

Then, with leaden feet which stumbled in a sudden darkness that overwhelmed me I groped my way back to the empty house.

THE END

